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GRANITE

By the Same Author

FURZE THE CRUEL

Four Impressions. 6s.

The Daily Mail says:—"Dartmoor has inspired many good novels, but never before, we think, one quite so good as this. What it is that makes a novel great it is difficult to say, but, though it be a quality we cannot define, we always know when it is present. It is in 'Furze the Cruel'—a something that makes us read without questioning the matter or the manner. . . . To understand the full meaning of 'Furze the Cruel' we must make a note of the little foreword in which Mr Trevena explains that this novel is the first of a trilogy. It is his intention to follow the present book, in which is worked out the idea that the furze is typical of cruelty, with a second in which the heather will typify endurance, and a third with the strength of the granite for its theme."

HEATHER

Three Impressions. 6s.

The Daily Chronicle says:—"'Furze the Cruel' was the first of a moorland trilogy, and Mr Trevena has now published the second of the three promised volumes, 'Heather.' Let it be said without further preamble that 'Heather' is the best book that the author has written, and that if he never improves upon this work—though, doubtless, as he gains experience he will—he will yet have made a name for himself for which the great majority of his fellow-craftsmen may well bear him envy. . . . Must conclude with a hearty recommendation to all who love good literature to read 'Heather.'"

GRANITE

BY

JOHN TREVENA [pseud.]

AUTHOR OF

"A PIXY IN PETTICOATS," "ARMINEL OF THE WEST,"
"THE DARTMOOR HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT," ETC.

LONDON: ALSTON RIVERS, LTD.
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GRANITE

INTRODUCTORY

ABOUT THE WALL

JOB LITHERN'S father built it. Such was the known history of the wall, which in the common tongue was called a hedge. What was Job Lithern's father? A man. So is that weak white-handed thing which often leans against the wall; but they are as far apart as the sea-anemone and the octopus, the one vegetating, the other writhing and restless; there were almost as many links between them as there are stones in the wall.

Let us look for the living creature, and define it hereafter. Each biotic portion counts like separate rocks in the wall, and the fraction is greater than the whole, because it becomes the whole at last. You cannot remove a rock without leaving a gap which must be stopped up or the whole is useless. To one is added the fraction of genius; it is nothing at first, imperceptible, but it is greater than the whole. To another the fraction of cruelty, to another the fraction of strength. The fraction is dominant. It is of all problems most difficult, but there must be a solution. Perhaps it is written in the granite.

The garden was only a moorland field. Undoubtedly little people danced in a ring there sometimes. It was planted with sweet-smelling firs, and the rough Dartmoor wall—Job

Lithern's father built it—passed round. The weak white-handed thing hurried out, being called by a cry in this garden. The wall-builder would not have heard that cry, although he may have heard others. He knew what it was, the evening sorrow, the sun's tragedy, as he struggled to go while the brambles held him, to give more light, more strength, and heat to darken their berries. These brambles were terrible; long and thick, studded with flesh-hooks. They ruled the garden; they seemed to rule the world; and every fine evening as the sun went down they caught and held him for a time while he fought until the thorns pierced him in every part and the sky was bloody and the Rattlebrooks ran red; until the kindly globe turned over a little, dragged the cruel brambles off, and let him go.

The sun and the brambles and the wall. The brambles grew out of the wall, their limb-like roots were underneath its stones, and the sun was the last boundary beyond. The brambles were chains, the wall was fashioned out of the plutonian granite against which many are pinioned to be tortured by vultures of passion and disease, while the sun is the hero hovering above with sword of heat and sandals of light longing to set them free.

The sun caught in the brambles brought the weak white-handed thing into the garden. He wanted to help the great friend—men do these presumptuous things, standing at the Creator's elbow saying, "You made that wrong. Do it again" —to attack the enemy with his mattock and beat them down; but he only bruised his body against the wall; and the sunlight streamed into his eyes and blinded him, which happens when a man tries to help divinity. And then a voice seemed to come from the wall, a funny little voice with a gentle hum, an amused little voice, and perhaps rather a disgusted little voice, murmuring, "Here's another. But this couldn't build a wall."

No doubt the weak white-handed thing was answering himself. Pink evening is a mystic time.

"Where are you?" he called, as if he might be talking to the sun.

"Under the moss. I'm held in the granite, and I shall never get out."

"Are you really alive?"

"That's a silly question. Everything is alive. Who are you? What do you call yourself?"

"Only a fool," said the weak white-handed thing. "I thought I was learned once, and I opened a lot of books and sniffed at them, and the books said to me, 'What an ignorant creature you are,' but I laughed at them. Then I became older and opened the same books again; and I said, 'I know nothing.'"

"That's right," said the funny little voice. "We may live in a house of granite, but when we look at the walls we cannot read."

"What are you?"

"I'm one of the little things of the wall. There are thousands of others. I'm near the top of the lump of granite which is third from the bottom, if I don't mistake. Don't pull the moss off to look for me, because you couldn't see me without one of your strong glasses, and now I have coaxed a nice warm quilt of moss over my poor little body I want to keep it. I am able to talk, as this is my birthday. We are allowed to say a little on our birthdays."

"How old are you?"

"A billion and sixteen," said the funny little voice. "I have kept count very carefully. Some friends, who live near me in the granite, asked my age this morning, and I dropped the billion. They laughed until the wall shook. I used to be considered a funny fellow in the Silurian period."

"Have you a name?"

"There were no such things in my time. I was locked away in the granite ages before your species appeared."

"Is there any connection between us, I wonder?" interrupted the weak white-handed thing.

"Of course there is. Do try and use your head. You are descended from me. You are the perfect creature," said the funny little voice with a horrid chuckle. "If I had never grown in the Silurian sea you would not be standing now in this Dartmoor garden. You may call me grandfather if you like."

"Can you remember the past?"

"Better than I remember the building of the wall, but before I could finish the first chapter of the wonderful story your lifetime would be over. I remember the first sea and its bed of algæ. I remember my first sweetheart. Ah, grandson, girls are not what they were."

"What kind of girls were they, grandfather?"

"Girls of my own class. Zoophyte girls."

"You are a Zoophyte!"

"That's what your wise men call me."

"Creation started with a tangle of weeds," muttered the weak white-handed thing.

"No more weeds than you are," cried the funny little voice. "Weeds indeed! Look to it, you perfect creatures, with your vices, and remember not to gibe at your ancestors. It is true life came out of the sea; the bed of algæ steaming in Silurian mist was the cradle of what you call the human race, the first teeming mass of population, the primitive London. Ah yes, grandson, the world was overcrowded with life ages before it became human life. The world is no more populated now than it was in Silurian times. But the sun is going; I must soon stop chattering. What was that nonsense you were muttering about fractions when you bumped against the wall?"

"It wasn't nonsense," said the weak white-handed thing rather crossly. "I was thinking of Job Lithern's father who made the wall."

"Made it! Hold your noise. He built it," broke in the rude little voice. "Men take one thing from one place, and another thing from another place, and put the two things together and say, 'What creators we are!' And the ant watches them and says, 'We taught them that when they had tails to wag.'

Wait till you're past your billionth birthday, grandson. You'll know something by then."

"I thought to myself Job Lithern's father was made like a man, but was he one?" went on the weak white-handed thing calmly. "The fractional part of him was a machine, and it was the fraction which grew, not the man. So he became little of a man and much machine."

"Right, right!" cried the little Professor Zoophyte. "Certainly the part swallows up the whole. The bud grafted upon the stem conquers. Grandson, what is a man?"

"I do not know, grandfather."

"I was a man," said the funny little voice. "Job Lithern's father was a man, you are a man. And it is the fraction which makes the man; makes or mars."

"You were half plant, half animal."

"Are you so much better? Have you the beauty of the flower or the faithfulness of the animal? Do you not know that passion is the fractional part of the plant? I was a plant, you say, but there was in me the fraction of animal passion which made me look to another of my species. If I had not been compelled to do so, you would have been a scrap of seaweed. Has not the plant a soul? has it not comprehension and discernment? Has it not passions? It is cruel, it endures, it is strong. It is either male or female, and to beget and bear young there must be fertilisation. Watch the passionate embrace of the love-apple. Consider the sun-dew in your bog. Were your eyes stronger you might see the sticky disc gleaming with eagerness when the fly buzzes near. Progress divinely slow is the order of the universe. The plant of one age is the animal of the next. Are we not all witnesses?"

"And behind the plant, grandfather?"

"That impenetrable Silurian mist. We don't go back to it. We have come out of it, and we progress, we go on. It is the law which has never been broken by a miracle, except in myth, because it is the greatest of miracles. The light is nearly out, grandson."

"Can you say that man is the greatest wonder of creation?"

"No. Oh no! The beginning is the wonder. I am the wonder. You are only the development of the wonder."

"What is the finest thing in man, grandfather?"

"Grandson, I think it is strength."

"What kind of strength?"

"That which triumphs over its own weakness."

There was time for one more question before the sun finished bleeding, and the weak white-handed thing asked it quickly, "Is there no book in which we may read everything? Cannot we fools become wise?"

"We cannot get over the wall, grandson. There is the book. Read it."

Such was the answer of the little Professor Zoophyte, and the student went away thinking. It was impossible to get over the walls, because they stretched one beyond the other, some of them very high, others topped with furze, and upon the last was a fence. Even the Zoophyte has never climbed the wall. And yet men are always trying, jumping at the wall with uncouth efforts and reeling back bruised. There is a wall between science and religion; let us climb it. There is a wall between the living and the dead; let us climb it. Some get up high enough to see another wall beyond, and that is all. Whatever the subject of study the end is the same. The wall is always there, and every thinker falls stunned against it, for it is a cruel wall and brambles grow out of it.

It has been written on; hieroglyphics like the Zoophyte have been marked upon its surface; the wall is a book, and its stones are the pages printed on and published before life became ambulatory. It is not a rare and precious book, because every field possesses its copy; but the writing has been done by authors who rose very early and stamped the stony folios of this great book of time, not with their thoughts, but with themselves, with their own biographical bodies as if they would say, "There is no revelation except through the eye. See us and believe." So the wall becomes a history book, a

precious palimpsest written upon again and again by vegetation, fishes, reptiles, birds, placental mammals. It contains the genealogy of the bustling, panting family of red nature. It is a place of the dead, an ossuary, a cemetery; and scientists stand outside the railings of those large-hooked brambles to wonder at the tombs.

So the weak white-handed thing reasoned. The world was a place of the dead, the dead vegetation, fishes, reptiles, birds and mammals of a billion years, and he was one of that little handful of living creatures which moved upon their dust and grew them grain to make bread in a vast charnel house until they too went into the wall to become another chapter of the book and fossils locked in stones. What is a man? The little Professor Zoophyte could not tell. Is he the greatest of all created things? Is he the owner of the earth? "Oh no," says the funny little voice of consciousness. The insect is greater than man, because the insect came first. Man never taught the bees architecture or the ants government; but the ant and the bee taught man. Which is the greatest to the eye of the wall-builder, the sun-maker? Who can bind the proportion of that eyesight, to which nothing is little and nothing is great? An eyesight which passes perhaps over great cities, armies, and churches, noticing not much; and lingers long upon hardly perceptible insects, seeing a great deal. Man may possess all the virtues of the ant, but we do not know that the ant possesses the worst vices of the man.

Is he the owner of the earth? "Oh no," comes the answer again, not necessarily from the little voice, for the brambles and the furze-bushes and the heather and large-rooted ferns reply to that question, "The earth is ours." Man is not the owner of the world. It belongs to the weeds as it did at the beginning. A man buys a field and declares it is his, but he lies. It belongs to the grass. The weeds are the leaseholders, but over them are the lords of life and land, the stewards of the king who granted his crown patent to the grass; the sun which makes men breed, the wind which tosses him about, the

water that he struggles in, the maddening honey of love which he tastes with a wild shudder, and tastes again, the rock that his mind splits upon. These are the masters.

But the weak white-handed thing was wrong. The sun struggling in the brambles beside the wall told him so, and the little Professor Zoophyte convinced him of error, and even Job Lithern's father in Fursdon churchyard told him he was wrong. The wall is not a cemetery, nor is the world a place of the dead.

The Zoophyte lives, and time is nothing. The age of vegetation supplies the energies of this present life; the animals which once sheltered beneath its branches are now men who warm themselves with its heat. It is the triumph of the fraction. It was the triumph of the fraction which made the Zoophyte more animal than plant; made the moving creature more man than animal; and the thinker sometimes more than man. And the triumph of the fraction rests upon a foundation stronger than granite; upon faith. Not upon a jingling creed nor any mystery wrapped in mist; but upon the simple instinct which has cried aloud all down the ages, "You have put something in me. It teaches me to look forward, to see more life beyond the wall. You cannot break this faith. You cannot prove false to me."

That is the fraction pre-eminent. It was in the Zoophyte, though the cry was a small one. The Zoophyte was told somehow it would develop into a Socrates and a Shakespeare; and the promise was kept. It was in Job Lithern's father, though he was a machine, and his cry too was a small one. He was told somehow that he would rise to a higher life; and the promise must be kept. . . .

Come and stand beside the wall while the sun is bleeding among the brambles. A little thinking does not hurt, and it should not be much weariness, because if there had been no thinking the Zoophyte would have remained half plant, half animal. Life must not be all music and dancing. The wall you notice loses its frown when you are close to it, and the

stones are decorated, covered with cunning tracery of ivy, moss, and stonecrop. The wall is a temple if you like. The lizard darts in and out, and in the crevices are birds' nests; and there are a number of funny little voices. There is one, it is the voice of a tender plant, the saxifrage, a conceited voice. "What is stronger than granite?" it says. "I am stronger than granite." And there is another, the little Professor Zoophyte again, talking while the sun goes down, because the years glide along so quickly, and he is a billion and seventeen to-day. Let us ask another question.

"Grandfather, can you hear beneath the moss?"

"Oh yes, grandson, I can hear very well."

"You said strength is the finest thing in man. But what is the strongest thing of all?"

"Grandson, it is light which conquers darkness—human darkness."

CHAPTER I

ABOUT LOVE LANE

"SCAT yew, Tibby. How yew did mak' me jump!" screamed Patience. "But there, I loves yew. Yew'm a proper little booful lamb yew be;" and down she went on her knees, though the lane was muddy, and kissed the woolly face with ardour.

Patience was always kissing or desiring to. She kissed the dogs and cats, the horses and cows, even the pigs; she kissed the pillow when she was in bed, as it gave her a sense of companionship; but she did not often kiss her father or mother, because they seemed too closely related to give a pleasure to the kisses, and for the same reason she neglected to embrace her sister Temperance; but she had kissed Temperance's young man, Timothy Mosscrop, when nobody was about.

Patience was only fifteen, though she looked little younger than Tempy, who was eighteen. She had a slightly freckled face, fair hair showing not the slightest inclination to curl, and a shining skin which might have looked better had she made use of some more suitable toilet preparation than scrubbing soap. She was thin if in some ways over developed, her chin was too pointed, her forehead too narrow, and the skin appeared to be stretched tightly upon her face, making the nose too sharp, giving her an eager almost sly expression. Her eyes were small, rather a light blue normally; but if a boy put his arm round her waist and squeezed her they became instantly dark and unpleasant. Even a glance would bring that wild darkening of her eyes. Still, Patience was pretty

from the cottagers' point of view; and an artist also would have found her pretty, but he would have added to her face the beauty which was not there, the light of reason, the glow of intelligence; he would have suggested some moral reflections in the sleepy darkness of those eyes.

Patience, a most excellent if sometimes an exasperating virtue; a lamb passably clean; and they lived in Love Lane Farm. Here were ordinary materials for a pastoral scene which is rather the good fruit of imagination than the result of observation. The light did its best, for it was the light which made the idyll of Love Lane; which brought the warm and fragrant mist from the peaty soil, and with its miraculous touch had kindled those thousands of yellow primrose sparks. Spring was always early in Love Lane, and it came suddenly, creeping over the moor by night, taking the winter by surprise and making Caleb toss uneasily in his bed, throwing the blankets off and almost wishing the windows had been made to open. It took the roots by surprise too. They had almost persuaded themselves they were dead, and suddenly strength entered the soil, quickening them, making them heave and burrow like moles and worms seeking for food in the earth. The warm light was coming and the mighty dawn pressed upon them. Who could resist it? Not the young girl Patience, nor the lamb Tibby, nor the primroses. It was the restless longing time when there is too much and never quite enough.

Nobody would call the primrose a strongly scented flower, but then not every one had wandered down Love Lane, which was merely a private cart-way circling round Blue Violet and ending at the farm, or Starke's as it was usually called. There the great hedges were yellow with primroses heated by the sun and giving forth an odour of indescribable fulness, not crude and drunken like the breath of exotics which suggests violence and loss of restraint, but in a measure stronger because so delicate. That odour of the primrose is spring, only you cannot get it undiluted. The smell of the earth will rise at the same time and the earth remains; the primrose is

only a passing pilgrim, saying as it comes and goes, "I am the idyll"; but the earth is there always, saying, "I am the reality."

Patience had not picked any of the primroses. She had noticed them however with, "What a lot there be!" and had dismissed the subject, as one of no interest to herself, with the criticism, "How 'em smells!" She carried something which was far more engrossing, the leg of a fowl from which protruded a long string-like tendon, and this she pulled from time to time, restoring to the poor dead claws a semblance of life, making them expand and contract as they had done early that morning before Barseba Starke had gone into the poultry-house like a destroying angel with her sword. It was a grim burlesque, but it pleased Patience.

The lane was full of noises; even the most inanimate things seem to give forth some sound in spring. Water splashing or dripping, wind singing a long way off, reeds whispering, and birds declaring their happiness and matrimonial intentions with amazing vigour. There was also a sound of whistling which might have been mistaken for the notes of one of those birds, because it whistled no tune in particular, but Patience knew what it meant. She did not wander down Love Lane to admire the beauty of it; and here was the whistler approaching with primroses on each side and wearing a few of them in his hat.

"Mark," said Patience, or rather she made a piping sound, dividing the name into two syllables, singing the last in an upward key. It was the usual form of salutation prettily expressed, and it meant, "I wish you good evening, Mark, and hope you are well."

"Patience," said the young man gravely, as if the weight upon his back was the world instead of a bundle of clothes.

The girl wheeled round, pushed the leg of the fowl into his face, and pulled the tendon. "Now he'm open. Mind he don't scratch ye. Now he'm shut. Oh my! B'ain't yew pert!"

She meant proud, which Mark Yeo was not. They were

young, comrades, and alone. Why couldn't he catch hold of her, throw her among the primroses, and give her some sound refreshing kisses? That was what Patience had come out for. It was silly to waste time being "pert," and a mock struggle among the primroses would have put her to sleep that night with the feeling that the day had not been lost.

Mark walked on almost as if he had been alone, and yet he was fond of Patience; but he knew there was poison in her. He wished to get it out and instil into her mind some of the sweetness and purity—only a little, for much would be impossible—of the flowers which her face resembled, or would have resembled, if the poison had not been there.

He couldn't get rid of the past, as the girl played about him with that unpleasant fowl's limb, and her half-savage little tricks; the past, though he was only twenty. That time and place made the memory distinct. Patience, half-clad, upon the moor, barely out of the age of toddling; he, in his short coat and tiny breeches, leading her by the hand, dragging her by superior force into those paths which she did not wish to tread. And how they played beside the river; he with flowers, she with worms, or anything else that was slimy and wriggling. "Little boy, du' ye pull your clothes off when yew goes to bed?" It was an innocent question, but there was a drop in it even then of poisonous matter. "I takes mine off myself. Mother ses I be a clever maiden." But little Mark said nothing, for he thought he saw a shadow upon the granite. Even as a child he had seen that shadow and wondered what it could be; not a form, nor anything seen clearly; not a real shadow, but merely something there. "Little boy, shall us pull our clothes off now?" "No," he answered. "I don't like to. I be frightened." "Us could fancy us wur worms. I be a booful brown maiden, mother ses." But the little boy only edged away from her. He had spoken the truth when he said he was frightened. The thing upon the granite might be angry; become dark and monstrous, and swallow him altogether. He wished he could find out what that thing was.

And now he was a man, or nearly so; not strong, sickly-looking, his face rather thin, with a curious appearance of being twisted to one side. People who passed him during twilight for the first time thought him a handsome fellow, but when they saw him in sunlight wondered how they could have been deceived. Mark was not handsome apart from his eyes, and not everyone appreciated them, because they couldn't understand them; they were eyes which saw things that ordinary people declared had no existence. "There is nothing wrong with Caleb Starke," one might have said; but Mark could see there was something wrong. "Patty be as gude a maid as ever lived," her mother might have declared; but Mark could see the beast that was fighting for her. "There be nought to see on Dartmoor 'cept the vuzz, heather, and granite, wi' the vern and pluffy trade," old Will Yeo, his father, had said often enough, and sometimes to reassure himself; but Mark knew there was something always ahead of him sitting upon the stones, and the shadow of it became darker as he grew older.

"Any other fellow would ha' craved to kiss me after I'd walked up along the lane to meet 'en," whispered Patience. "Yew'll ha' plenty o' chances avore us gets down into the court," she said, winding her arm round his, hanging on him with small tantalising weight like ivy clinging on the rock seeking for any opening to force its roots in.

"Kisses b'ain't such free and easy things," he said in the same grave manner which was becoming a fault, as it would have been better for him to have laughed sometimes. "When 'em means nought, Patty, 'em be nought, I reckon."

"Aw, yew'm an old Methody. I'd like to scat ye wi' this old claw, so I would. I be agwaine to hold on to ye, Mark, though yew hates me."

"Not me"; and the cloudy sign was telling him it might be good for the girl if she would hold on. "The maid I kisses I gives a ring to."

Mark had faults. He was as human as most young fellows, but he had not the gift of godliness which makes the Puritan

lift up his hands at beauty and call it shameful. If he didn't seize hold of Patience, and embrace her with the savage energy of his class, it was because of the sign, partly perhaps from selfishness. He wanted Patience, but before she was his he had to cultivate her. A field upon the moor cannot be made to blossom without infinite labour of rock-clearing, furze-uprooting, and soil-making. It was the same with the girl. She could not be made a wife until that poison had been extracted, and constancy infused in its place. She was very young; she might be bent, and grow in the right direction. Probably he was thinking of himself then more than of her. He was proposing to plant a garden, thinking of the pleasure it would give him.

"Oh my! a ring!" she cried, with a jarring noise of laughter, holding out a well-shaped childish hand. "Tempy be agwaine to wear one, but not me, Mark. What fun can a maid have when her wears a ring? 'Tis all dish-washing and babies to mind, and never a vair from one year to t'other. Yew'll see Patty Starke dance a bit, I reckon, avore her wears a ring."

"Right enough, Patty. B'ain't time vor yew to think on't yet. But when yew ha' finished your dance, mebbe yew'll be tired and glad to sit down."

"Not in Blue Violet," said she. "A town, Mark. Stones to walk on. Shops to buy fine clothes, silks and laces. That's what I craves vor."

"Take care," said the cloudy sign to Mark; and it receded for the moment, fading into the primroses with the faint word, "prophetess."

Love Lane was very narrow; only wide enough for two to walk side by side; no room for quarrelling there. Cart-wheels had cut two waving lines of rut, the path was a beaten maze of horse-shoe imprints, and all the rest was grass. A place of beautiful weeds, but some were poisonous; and here and there were granite boulders protruding harshly as if struggling to escape from the deep womb of the earth, and as fast as they

worked their way into the light the earth and the weeds seemed to spring at them, the moss covered them, the ivy tried to make ropes about them, the polypody ferns forced themselves from every rift. It was almost pathetic to see these weak things trying to soften and subdue the granite, these parasites saying in the pride of their position, "How we hold down the stones." Beyond was a patch of soil steaming, and in the mist were clouds of insects dancing furiously as if knowing their life was only a few hours long and it was necessary to spend none of it in dulness. There is no time for gravity in insect life. The longer the time of energy the greater the melancholy. What could be graver than the long-lived tortoise, or more solemn than the thousand-year-old yew-tree? Men and women live not long, but too long to be always happy; for a year of fears, of struggling, of watching and waiting, a year in short of active existence is a long period of time.

"Ain't yew got a clothes-box?" asked Patience, looking at the somewhat ungainly bundle on the young man's back.

"No," he answered shortly.

"I've got a proper one, all shiny tin, and two keys to lock him with," she cried proudly.

"What du yew want wi' a clothes-box?" he asked quickly.

Patience jumped ahead, laughed, tossing her short skirts about. "I be going abroad next week."

"Where be going?"

"Plymouth—to service."

Mark stopped; the bundle had become a heavy burden, as if it contained the weight of all those years which were to come. How wild the girl was, and young and small, and so ignorant! His eyes wandered to the steaming patch, to the giddy insects whirling there.

"Yew should bide home," he said.

"Bide in an old farm!" she cried scornfully. "I ha' teased vaither to let me go ever since I wur twelve, and he said not till yew'm sixteen. Well, I be sixteen next week, and Tempy be going, and I wun't bide home when her be gone. I ha'

got a place in Plymouth. Wun't I get the dear boys after me!"

"Yew must bide here, Patty."

"Aw, yew old Methody. Best go and preach the gospel, Mark," she screamed delightedly, pulling a bunch of primroses and throwing them at him. They fell upon the path and soon faded, for that hot childish hand had strangled the life out of them.

Mark looked ahead beyond the pretty dancing figure, which was as a merry insect, and saw the granite. The thing was there sprawling, rather horrible, darker in appearance, and the message was clear enough. "Now, Mark!" That was all, but he understood. To let this silly young creature escape from home, go to a town its streets frequented by hot-blooded youths of the Army and Navy, enter a situation where she would be almost turned out upon those streets after dark twice a week, this little fool of sixteen, what would it mean? What was the difference between letting Patience go to Plymouth and the Druidical sacrifice of a maiden upon the granite altar to the sun, except that in the early stages of human belief there might be found an excuse for the first, but in the lowest depths of human ignorance none for the second?

The shadow of these ideas, rather than the ideas themselves, presented themselves to Mark. He was so far different from other young men of his class that he could perceive these shadows; not by his own learning, but through the power of observation given him by the thing, the cloudy sign, the shadow upon the granite, which was not there really but was in himself and was as inexplicable as is the whole nature of man. His bundle fell upon the path; he put out his hands, large and rough, hands already hard, hands not to be ashamed of; and his eyes were tender, pitiful rather than affectionate, as he said, "Here, Patty."

"He'm agwaine to preach. Where be Tibby to? All little lambs come round to hear Mark tell o' Sunday schules," she cried excitedly, too young to know what she was saying. "Aw,

teacher, I knows the lesson. What be your name? I be Patty, teacher. Who gave ye your name? Them what stood vor me, teacher. There, Mark, I be only teasing of ye, but I'm vair mazed to get out of this old place. I be a proper little maiden, b'ain't I now?"

"I don't want ye to go to Plymouth, Patty."

"I'll write, Mark, and tell ye how I be doing."

"Yew ha' never been in a town. Who will look after yew?"

"Dear boys," she laughed.

"When be Tempy going to church?" he asked unexpectedly.

"First o' the month."

"Let's go. There be time."

"Don't ye be vulish, Mark."

"Tak' me, Patty——"

"I wun't. I be tu young."

"Tak' me," he repeated, coming towards her.

"Don't ye look like that. Yew looks like killing me. I hates yew when yew looks strong."

"Say yes, and 'twill be gude vor ye."

"If I ses yes to-day, I'll say no to-morrow. I b'ain't agwaine to wear a ring yet;" but he could see she was yielding, not because she wanted to. He began to understand himself, not his body, which was nothing, but his mind, which he was hardly conscious of. He could win her by force; he had it in him to make her yield; he could compel her to go to church with him; and he felt that with the ring on her finger she would be tame. But was it fair? Was it right to subdue the body and leave the rest uncaptured? That had to be answered, and he looked ahead for the sign that never failed. "Yes, it is right," was the answer. "The strong must help the weak."

"No, Mark, I be frightened. I don't want to," she said. Then she cried scornfully, "Why, yew ain't even got a clothes-box."

Weakness strikes blows like this, and makes the foundations

of strength totter. It is not man with his iron bar and hammer who wears away the rock; it is the weak and gentle raindrop.

"Yew ain't got a cottage neither."

It was all true. He had got nothing in the shape of worldly goods. His clothes were in that bundle, and all the few things he owned were among them. All that he had he could carry with him; and now he was on his way to Love Lane Farm to enter the service of this girl's father, to be the hired hand, the hind, the chap as it was called locally; and he proposed to marry Patience, who was after all a small child, without a home to offer her. It was a ridiculous idea. Caleb Starke would tell him to "leave the maid bide." Timothy Mosscrop, who was about to marry Temperance, would call him a fool. Timothy was a man of business, and had secured the cottage at Blue Violet before getting Tempy to name the Sunday.

"Yew'm right, I reckon," he said; and as he spoke she jumped round, saying, "Yew don't want me."

"Wait till yew comes home Christmas," he answered, picking up the bundle. He was beaten. The customs of civilisation were not to be crossed. They might be boy and girl in Love Lane, with the sign ahead, which was of stuff that souls are made of, but life is not a piece of pastoral poetry. There would be winter and storms, what of the lane then? There must be walls and a roof; within all manner of things, chiefly unnecessary; and there must be sufficient money to buy food. Civilisation was made for the body; the mind must creep about and find a shelter among the rocks as best it can.

The lane made a sharp bend, appeared to lose control over itself, and rushed down to a wobbling gate hinged upon a granite post wonderfully firm by contrast. Upon the other side spread the court, with a pond on one side, low buildings upon the other, and down the centre, where rocks protruded, manure stacks rotted. The farm-house at the far end was very old and decayed; all its thatch seemed to have been turned

into moss. There was an air of abandon about the place, a reckless state of ruin; everything was in the happy-go-lucky condition of bankruptcy at any moment. The scoops in the wall for bee-hives were damp and stuffed with brambles. Behind were old apple-trees, none erect, most of them sprawling, covered with grey lichen; what fruit they produced went to the pigs. Much of the land had not been cleared. Furze covered one field, boulders were everywhere, and lower down there was fern to reckon with. That ground would not respond to gentle treatment; it had to be fought with hammers and dynamite, and its answer was a curse, for wherever the ploughshare was driven it struck a rock.

Love Lane Farm had been owned always by poor folk. The earlier tenants had cleared a portion, and those who came after remained satisfied with what had been cleared. Much strength is needed to tame moorland, and when the task seems done the moor never forgets what has been taken away and tries to regain it. A little negligence and the free spirit leaps the wall to plant the field anew with furze. The property was not valuable, yet several obtained an income out of it. Caleb and Barseba Starke were the tenants, and they paid a rent of seventy pounds to no less than six impecunious landlords and landladies.

More than a hundred years back, when Dartmoor was still inhabited by savages and an almost incredible state of lawlessness existed, from which it has hardly yet released itself, when a man who called himself squire was king and tyrant, owning something like the power of life and death, the district was owned by one Fursdon, a strong man who defied everyone, especially the absent Duke, which was an easy thing to do in those days, as no Duke of Cornwall ever took the trouble to visit his property—though there is a wicked story concerning a certain Duke who expressed an intention of doing so and travelled up to Yorkshire for that purpose. Squire Fursdon made one hundred granite longstones, and these he set up wherever "he had a mind to," upon moor, common, or private

property, and each stone was his boundary mark in that direction, and all peoples and languages were expected to fall down and worship the stones. There was a touch of Nebuchadnezzar about Squire Fursdon. When some poor wretch came to him, saying, "Squire, yew ha' took in my patch," the answer was always, "I'll fight ye vor't," and the challenge was not accepted. It was a simple way of acquiring property, and as a striking illustration of the truth in the adage "out of evil good may come," it so happened that Squire Fursdon unintentionally bequeathed much benefit to posterity. No one ever dared to meddle with longstones when they were boundary marks. Even when the squire died and his family disappeared, those big pillars were regarded with reverence. He had taken in two hundred acres of Dartmoor to which he had no right, yet the Duchy never ventured to reclaim them. Many of his stones stand to-day upon the high moor, as erect and defiant as when he set them there; some have fallen, but storms and not the hand of man have dragged them down; and even though they are half-buried in peat, or quite hidden by heather, nobody ventures to touch them, because they are the boundaries of the parish as appointed by the strong old squire.

When he died, leaving no heir, there were great times in the parish. Squire had sown, but the parishioners reaped. Squire had seized that big expanse of granite-covered moorland, had added it as it were to the parish, although such was not his intention, and they were his heirs. Up they swarmed, each man taking a piece for himself; there was a general pegging out of claims, and when, at a later date, Duchy officials came to turn them off, they pointed triumphantly to the pillars and picked up stones and turves to drive the lawful owners out. That portion of moor is now covered with a network of loose stone walls enclosing fields. There is hardly a man in the parish who does not own one or more, and the phrase, "The Duchy b'ain't landlord here," has become a byword.

Squire Fursdon has been for a long time a sort of tutelary hero,

a being half divine; what Romulus was to Rome or Theseus to Athens so is he to Fursdon parish. His must have been an interesting character; a mind of sheer brute strength which ploughed its way through obstacles like an elephant tearing through undergrowth, sweeping everything aside by strength and weight. When he became a man he renamed the parish, forcing his signature upon it, writing Fursdon upon the map, and the country accepted it. The ordnance surveyors did obeisance to the great stone figure of the squire, and at his command revoked names which had been in use since the Danish invasion.

Here was a king of men who, if the tales be true concerning him, might with opportunity have made an Empire. He lives in his granite pillars and in the network of granite walls. His mind was a rock; but as the rock is covered with moss and stonecrop there was in that hard soul a bud of poetry, not altogether that of sentiment, the man was too fierce, but tricky, half-malicious; there was a thorn under the flower. If it was in the spirit of the wild rose that he named his various farms Love Lane, Blue Violet, Rose Ash, it was with the thorn of the rose he wrote his will. One can imagine his growl of laughter as he formed the words which bequeathed Love Lane to no less than a dozen of his servants. He knew well enough what discontent it would cause, what wrangling and confusion; how one would try and swallow the shares of the others, how suspicious they would be of each other, and how gloriously the place would fall into ruin, because, when it was the business of so many to keep it in repair, nothing would be done.

The story of the various shareholders of Love Lane Farm cannot be told here. Time had reduced the number of proprietors to six, the brothers Oli and Eli Rescorla, each owning one share; Samuel Wreford, better known as Old Coles or the man of the road; George and Maria Vid, each holding one share; and Judith Boone, the witch of Dry Arch. Each share produced fourteen pounds a year, which is still a good deal of money upon Dartmoor; and as all repairs to the buildings had

to be performed by the proprietors it followed they had to be done by the Starkes or not at all.

Patience and Mark came down the hill, walking in a little red gully which the rain had made, the girl peevish because she hadn't been kissed, the man wondering what would become of them both; and the lamb frolicked behind.

"Look after Tibby when I'm away," she said in the pleading voice which is always attractive.

"Right," said Mark, with his eyes upon the ground.

"He'm mine. His mother wouldn't tak' 'en, so vaither brought 'en to me, and ses, 'Here, Patty, I ha' a baby vor ye.' They said I wouldn't rear 'en, but I did. Vaither wanted to cut his tail, but I wouldn't let 'en. I likes to see the little toad wiggle his tail while he sucks my finger. If vaither sells Tibby to the butcher, I'll never come home again. See 'en jump? There! Oh my, I du love babies!"

She ran on and pushed the gate open. To the right was a pond, or rather a dimple in the ground which collected most of the rain-water which ran down the hill; on the other side Barseba repelled the furious attacks of a large stag-turkey with her scouring-pole, insulting the big bird while she fought with it.

"I'll ha' ye in the oven Christmas morning. I'll rub your old belly wi' salt and fill him wi' stuffing. This be your last year upon earth," she cried, hinting darkly that the paradise of turkeys was nothing better than a human stomach. "Can't come over the court to pick up the eggs wi'out yew flying to my legs, and yew ain't earned your food since master paid thirty shilluns vor ye. I'd be ashamed of myself, I would, thirty shilluns and your food, and yew ain't done nought vor't since us bought ye," she cried, getting in a blow upon the bristling tail-feathers which made the Falstaffian bird puff like a steam-engine. Her hair, prematurely white, fell across her eyes. Barseba was not old, but had worked hard, and she expected the creatures of the farmyard to do the same. She was Caleb's second wife, and much his junior, though she

looked as old. Labour keeps a man young, but it soon ages a woman.

Patience turned to Mark, and whispered something about the bird and his character, which amused her, because it seemed so ridiculous; but he plodded on without smiling, his mind occupied with bigger matters, and almost angry to see the fields of Love Lane like old cemeteries covered with flat slabs which ought to have been cleared away.

"A proper looking bird he be, but he'm no gude," Barseba grumbled to Mark, the gobbler having strutted away, as his custom was, at the sight of one of his own sex. "I ha' to send the hens away to Squire Vivian's, or I'd get no eggs vor breeding. Us would soon ha' the end o' the world on us if us got as pert as he."

The turkey was certainly an advanced creature, a sort of bishop among birds. He had taken the vows of celibacy, he hated females; those of his own kind he ignored and those of the superior race he attacked. He led the stifled life of a recluse, and his cell was upon the hot and steaming crater of a dunghill; here he strutted and fumed, malevolent to the pigs, misanthropic towards mankind. Had he enjoyed temporal power over the farmyard he would have made it a kind of Mount Athos, where no females are admitted. Men he tolerated but with cynicism, because they were weak where he was strong. His was a character worth studying, if he had really been born a few thousand years too soon as a herald of the coming race. He made a step towards Mark, puffed at him in a high-priestly way as one who would say, "Vanity of vanities," then retired to his cell, discharging gallinaceous litanies.

"Mark," said another welcoming voice, stronger and harsher than that of Patience in the lane, but in the same sing-song fashion, dwelling upon the syllable dividing and prolonging it, "vaither wants yew. He'm in the orchard."

It was Temperance, the elder girl, a pretty creature, red and dark, with true eyes that never seemed to blink, though they were soft; had they been closed, and the redness taken from

her face, she could have posed for a statue. She looked well in repose with her large red hands behind and her big boots hidden by the rocks; but moving and speaking spoilt her, because her tongue betrayed ignorance which she could not help, and she had no grace, not a vestige. If the austere gobbler could have taught the younger girl virtue he could also have shown the elder one how to carry herself.

"Shall I tak' your bundle, Mark?" said Temperance, with a glance towards her sister as if she would have said, "Patience won't do anything but play."

"Us be glad to get ye, Mark," said Barseba, mindful that some sort of welcome was necessary. "Yew'm one o' the old-fashioned sort what can't reckon, I fancy. 'Tis the reckoning what spoils young chaps now, 'tis the multiplication-table, education 'em calls it. When I wur a young maiden us didn't have no multiplication-table, and us wur better vor't. Chaps didn't knaw what two times dree meant, but 'em knaws now, and 'em wun't bide wi' ye. 'Me clean out the pigsty. Why, I be a scholar, missis,' 'em ses. 'Clean 'en out yourself,' 'em ses. 'Yew b'ain't no scholar.' I thanks the Lord vor't," cried Barseba. "That there multiplication-table ought never to ha' been allowed."

A queer old head appeared above the hedge at the side of the house and a shivering voice called, "Mark, come over here, will ye?"

The young man went and found the master of Love Lane in a dejected attitude leaning upon the handle of a digging-pick, breathing uneasily. Caleb Starke was supposed to be a queer character because he held himself aloof from the social life of Fursdon. He was not a "drunkard," by which was meant he never entered a public-house; only those who did so were called drunkards, usually with justification. There was something wrong with Caleb, the neighbours said, without knowing there is something wrong with every man; but exactly what the mischief was, nobody quite discovered, because Caleb kept himself out of sight.

"Us be all ruined, Mark," said the old fellow sadly, while the young one looked around and observed how little had been done.

"Wants my old vaither here," he said.

"What would he be doing?" asked Caleb.

"He'd clear away them rocks, bleed the vern, root up the vuzz. He'd work by sun and moon till he'd got it clear."

"'Twould cost a man all his money," muttered Caleb.

"All his labour," replied Mark. "Work pays, master. A load o' manure be a good thing, but a load o' labour be better. If a man puts his strength into the land when he'm young it comes back to him when he'm old and keeps 'en from craving."

"Yew ses vunny things," replied Caleb. "I ha' heard o' yew how yew walks abroad on Dartmoor and sees ghosts."

"I knows nought about ghosts. I reckons I'd run if I saw one," said Mark in rather a surly voice; and Caleb, seeing that the light was going, went on quickly, "I ha' lost a lamb. I wants yew to help find him."

"He b'ain't dead, then?"

"He b'ain't dead, not exactly. I can't tell ye where I lost him. I reckoned 'twur in this orchard."

"Well, us can see he b'ain't here."

"Might be, Mark," said the old fellow. "He might be lying close under the vern. Us'll go over the fields along."

It was obvious he had not lost a lamb, but it was no business of Mark to say anything. He was only the hired hand, and was there to do his master's bidding, so he left the orchard with Caleb, and they went along a little stony road, where rain-water had gathered in a row of pools, and out into the fields beyond, where the road, which did not deserve that title, lost itself in holly-bushes and brambles. They were picturesque fields on the steep side of the hill, and each of them had a queer name, and each was so silent and lonely that it seemed as if the two men might have been the first to pass that way exploring.

"I comed through in the forenoon," explained Caleb.

"Wi' the lamb?" asked Mark smiling.

"Aw, I had him wi' me sure 'nuff," said Caleb crossly. "He wur a ewe-lamb and proper fat."

The first field was Stockey Furzen, and it was well-named, for furze grew everywhere. It had evidently been cleared a long time ago, because there were no rocks; but the laziness of tenants had permitted the cruel side of the moor to assert itself, and it had done so with greater luxuriance than usual, profiting by the tilled soil. Any number of lambs might have been straying there, but Caleb showed no inclination to descend among the furze-bushes. "I never went down under," he said. "Look over the path, will ye?" and he muttered to himself, "Missis must mend they old breeches o' mine."

The next field was a piece of moor, naked and unashamed. Little streams trickled down sandy channels to make a large bog along the bottom, and heather grew everywhere, although the furze had been cleared away. This would have been a good field had it been drained and properly cleared, because there was grass in it; but there was no lamb.

"Here be where I comed along," said Caleb, making it certain that the remarkable creature which had been lost could not stray from his imprints.

Then came a field of granite, a hopeless place without furze or heather, or at least with little to speak of, but the grass between the rocks was sweet. It was a dry shadowless field, and beyond was a field of fern, rather beautiful and mystic because trees were growing there, oaks and rowans, and their branches made a darkly-coloured picture; and on the other side was a place of reeds and rotting wood. The neglect was horrible. Trees felled years ago had decayed; the owner had forgotten they had been cut down, or had been too idle to take them away, or perhaps had not been offered as much as he wanted for them. To walk through those fields was to hear sermons. The rough path suggested the way of life; first the vicious furze, then the heather clinging to the open

space, and the unyielding boulders leaning in the next, and the mysterious fern sleeping in the last. The path went through these to end in rottenness and decay deep down beyond. These things represented so much to be found in the wonderful puzzle; and they spoke of perversity, shrinking, and fears, the half-hearted way of fighting giants. To clear from one field heather, granite, and fern, but to leave the furze; from another the furze, granite, and fern, but to leave the heather, what was this but labour gone mad, a division of toil which made the whole greater in the end? Yet it was done—by the weak.

In the field of granite the lamb was found. Caleb gave a cry of joy, "Here he be!" and gathered it up. Dull as the light was his eyes were sharp enough. The little thing was lying upon a slab of rock, which looked as if it ought to be inscribed to the memory of—whom you will; and as the old eager hand shot out, Mark saw this contemptible lost lamb, which was merely a copper, thin and dented by much commerce. It was a penny. Caleb had wasted the day looking for it. He could have earned two or three shillings by easier labour.

"Us'll get along home," he said happily.

Mark did not move. He was standing in a curious attitude, his body leaning forward, arms stiff, and his eyes were staring across the field of granite.

"What be yew looking after?" asked old Caleb.

"See yonder stone—the big round one?" said Mark at length.

"Ees, I sees mun," replied the old man, still rejoicing over the lamb he had found.

"Someone sits there," said Mark.

Caleb stared and laughed hoarsely, then tried not to feel frightened. "I sees nought," he said loudly.

"It be away now. I never saw him so plain."

"Wur he one o' they ghosts they ses yew sees?"

"I don't know what he be, master. He be sort o' cloudy

stuff what seems to tell to me. I looks over, and I sees him on the granite. Times he'm plain and times he'm faint. He tells me what I be to du."

"'Tis witchery, Mark," said Caleb. "Yew ask old Judy Boone about him. Her will tell ye how to get rid on't."

"I never saw him so plain," the young man repeated. Then they walked away into the field of heather.

Down below the country spread away shadowed by the deep purple twilight of the hills. They could discern the scarlet patches of ploughland, the black copses, the gleaming of a distant whitewashed village. It was a beautiful country.

As they entered the field of furze, Mark spoke, looking straight ahead at the lights which were beginning to make white spots in the deep dark distance—"I ha' got it now! 'The drink be to the bottom on't,' he said. 'Fight that.'"

CHAPTER II

ABOUT THE ROAD

THE main road was magnificent, straight, struck into the heart of the country like a great sword. Seen at a distance it waved grandly. It was so arrogant in its right of way, and the things crawling along it were small and black against its dusty whiteness. Those things that looked like insects from the height of the moor, those things which crawled the hill so slowly, were roadmakers. Wonderful little black things on two rather crooked legs who had built up that terrace-like road winding above Fursdon as if it led into another world.

Fursdon was proud of two things, its road and its mine. It took pride also in its beer-houses, not because they were remarkably good ones, but because it had such a lot of them. This village had a reputation for drunkenness to maintain, and opportunities were ample. When a miner lurched out of the door of the Queen's Arms he was bound to stumble over the threshold of the White Hart. If the landlord of the Black Lion roared his refusal to give trust there were other Lions, Red and Golden, ready to purr the rejected into their dens. Fursdon was not a poor place, on account of the mine which employed a great deal of labour, and yet every man seemed poor. Most of the inhabitants owned their cottages, but the interiors were generally wretched, the buildings were going rotten—the hedges and ditches were littered with broken bottles.

The mine, which was a breeder of beer-houses, always thundered away gently, and round it curved the road, silent

and indifferent, glittering with specks of mica, for granite had gone to the making of it, in the sunshine, black sometimes in winter, but not always, for the rain washed brown peat from one side and red clay from the other. The road was there always, and yet it was only there that people might get somewhere else. Everyone appeared in a hurry to get away from the road as if they were afraid of it; but rain and wind so often swept along it as if they wanted to keep the way clear for some great person who never came; and it had been found advisable to build a high hedge, topped with storm-loving beeches, upon the otherwise unprotected side to prevent horses and riders from being carried over upon the mossy roofs of Fursdon below.

There was a speck upon the road descending slowly, too slowly one might have thought to be a business speck; many ascended more quickly, but these were for the most part pleasure specks. First it was upon one side of the road then upon the other; it was an erratic speck, but it had an object in view. It was going to reach the bottom of the hill, and if it chose to take a wandering instead of a direct course, what could prevent it? Not time, for that had no influence. But there was another speck, curiously similar, and this was ascending. Even from the great height of Dartmoor, which spent its endless life looking down upon the road, the descending speck could be seen to wobble and hesitate as if the ascending one was putting forth a repulsive influence.

The specks touched beneath the miniature thunderstorm which was always taking place about the mine-buildings above, and resolved themselves into old men, ponies, and carts; two of each, but as different as old men, ponies, and carts could be. To a certain extent it became obvious why the descending speck had wobbled; the cart was very old, so was the pony; wheels and legs rocked to and fro and staggered; and the driver was equally frail. It would not have astonished the height of Dartmoor if old man, pony, and cart had fallen to pieces suddenly.

He was a very little, old man, fearfully dressed, and his face was covered with hair which had commenced to turn grey a generation back, but had gone no further. In the old cart were various articles of merchandise, a basket of oranges, a small barrel of fish somewhat too close to another barrel of rags, all of them sharing somewhat in the antiquity of their surroundings; with a few household articles, such as scrubbing-brushes and pans lying upon an absurd heap of coals which any hungry grate would have gobbled up in an hour or two. On one side of the cart was painted, in the kind of letters made familiar by mediæval tombstones, "Sam Wreaford." It was not correct, for the old fellow could not spell his own name. Sometimes, indeed, he had to look at the side of the cart to remind himself that his name was Wreford, because everybody called him Old Coles; that name too was wrongly spelt, but it was the old man's fault, or rather his misfortune, to have no head for letters and figures. He was a coal merchant, that is to say, a truckload of black goods, more valuable than tin or copper, arrived for him periodically, and the contents were stored in a shed beside the station and drawn upon according to orders. How the old pony wobbled the staggering cart up into the hill country with quarter of a ton of "coles" was one of the minor miracles; but the thing was done; the small heap would be delivered, precious dust and all, and the old man would prepare a marvellous cryptogram which he called a receipt. As for the rest of the merchandise, the golden oranges, the silver fish, the household articles and the rags, all of which became mixed together sometimes when the poor old cart left the great road and tottered along stony lanes, these had been added, not with any idea on the part of Old Coles to constitute himself a universal provider, but in order that he might pay his way upon the road. There was a tragedy in his life which was also the happiness of it. His little maid was in the asylum, and he travelled to and fro that he might visit her, take her presents, ask when she was coming home, mention that the bedroom was all ready, only he should like a day's notice

so that he might get the sheets aired. Old Coles didn't know what a lot of mistakes he made. The little maid had become big and grown up, and would never leave the asylum. She had been a little maid when she tried to murder him, and men in black coats came and took her away, though Old Coles assured them he had provoked her, which was not true; and when her senses went his memory departed also, so that she was still the little maid who would sing about the old 'pike and ask him for oranges. She was always fond of oranges, and that was why he had them in the cart.

The other old man was massive, squatting heavily in his cart like a mass of rock, his body wrapped in a huge brown coat, his face very red with a patriarchal beard sweeping round it. Everything about him looked solid and comfortable, which was misleading, because he was always in financial difficulties; he never paid his debts, and little tradesmen hated the sight of him. His cart was strong, made of well-seasoned wood, and painted a cold grey, which matched his mischievous eyes; his pony was young, but hungry. This old man was George Vid, far more respectable than Old Coles, just because he looked it. He wore big spectacles, which gave his face a gentle appearance at a distance, but when he came near those cunning eyes could be seen spiteful and glistening. He travelled with groceries to the outlying farms, soap and candles principally, although he was prepared to deliver anything and to charge for it; he was sorry to charge so much, but, as he explained, the lanes were so rough and the strain upon the pony was terrific. He never failed to get the last farthing out of his debtors, while his own creditors got nothing out of him without a judgment. As for the pony, no doubt it might have felt the strain less had its master travelled without that ash-stick. There was nothing for George Vid to do as he trotted along the road, and as he considered he was getting too fat and wanted exercise, he indulged in some gymnastics at the pony's expense; but it never occurred to him to get out sometimes and walk up the hills.

"I wish you a very good day," said Vid in his loud distinct tones, smiling all over his big red face. As he was a fine old gentleman, and well-educated, he did not speak the dialect. "We have not met for a long time, Mr Wreford, and as you know there is a little account."

He hit the pony because it was not standing in quite the position he desired, and when the poor beast jumped he hit it again for moving, his face full of wickedness; and after that he turned to Old Coles, all amiability and loving-kindness.

"The monthly account," he said in his rich and hearty voice. "Fifteen shillings and sixpence-halfpenny exactly."

Old Coles was standing beside his cart, listening to the thunder of the mine, wishing he had not come that way. He had never bought anything from Vid, but this was the bully's usual trick, and he was too weak to help himself. Vid looked like the Lord Chief Justice, capable of hurling all the thunderbolts of the law.

"I be an old man, Mr Vid," he said feebly. Nobody called the old cheat George, as he looked too solemn and magnificent for such familiarity.

"We are both getting on, but strong and hearty yet, thank God," said Vid, making his strong voice sound wonderfully sincere. "I have one advantage over you, Mr Wreford. My memory is quite perfect. I should not attempt to do business if it wasn't. You were out when I left the box of groceries, and I dare say you have forgotten."

"I don't owe yew nought, Mr Vid. I be very old," murmured the other, trying to steady himself against his wobbly cart.

"Ah, that's the memory," said Vid in his kindliest manner. "Of course some scoundrel may have stolen the box. I left it in the porch, but anyone can steal from your cottage. It is so exposed to the road, and tramps are always passing on the look out for what they can pick up. You will remember, Mr Wreford, things left for you have been stolen before."

"I wants my little maiden to come along home," said Old Coles.

"Ah, how is she, the little maiden?" asked Vid tenderly.

"They wun't let me in. 'Bide outside,' they ses. 'Us will give she the oranges.'"

"Dreadful!" cried Vid. "The one who loves her. She will come back to you some day, Mr Wreford. We must hope and pray. Then you will have someone to look after you, protect you from thieves—that reminds me we must get to business," he went on, with unconscious irony. "Before I came out to-day mother said, 'You must see Mr Wreford, George, and get the account settled.' Dear old mother, she found the money-box was empty."

Mother was Maria Vid, his wife, and another of the owners of Love Lane. Vid had married her for that reason.

"I owes yew nought," repeated Old Coles. "I be just taking this little bit o' coal down to Judy Boone."

"Soap has gone up in price," said Vid cheerfully. "I'm not going to charge you any more—an old customer. Fifteen and sixpence-halfpenny, Mr Wreford. I don't like taking money from those who can't afford it, but there is poor dear old mother, and business is business. Ah, and you must have ten per cent. discount, as you are a fellow-tradesman, though it knocks off my little bit of profit. That will be fifteen shillings exactly. I'll write you a receipt."

He pulled a sheaf of bill-forms from the pocket of the brown coat, and wrote, in a fine strong hand, "Goods as per invoice, fifteen shillings," signed it "George Vid, with very best thanks," smiling and chatting all the time, then handed it over and hit the pony for exercise.

Old Coles looked up at the noisy mine, then down to the silent road, both of them unsympathetic; then he pushed his stick into the cart and began to fumble for his pocket. There was no escaping from George Vid. He had tried to avoid payment before, but the bully had threatened him with a summons, and the policeman had called and advised him to settle, as both George and mother could swear the goods had been delivered, and the rambling explanation of Old Coles

concerning his age and the little maiden and the difficulty of procuring oranges had only made his case worse, because these things savoured of evasion. He was a foolish old man, and he couldn't reckon, so most people cheated him; neither could he find his money-pocket very easily. He knew exactly where it was, only his hand trembled so and he could not get it into the right place. He had to carry the money about with him, because his cottage was unprotected, and open to the road, which was a broad white stream filled with pirates. And in the meantime Vid laughed and talked, declaring they were two of the finest old fellows who had ever done business together.

The money was produced at last, wrapped up in various pieces of paper, the amount was counted out and handed over, and Vid gave thanks warmly, observing, "If everyone was as prompt as you, Mr Wreford, it would be easy to conduct business. I am going by your cottage," he added. "I will leave some groceries for you to go on with. I will leave the box near the door, and cover it with fern. These tramps are such rascals."

"Don't ye, Mr Vid. I'll ha' nought left vor the little maiden, and I be so old a-getting," came the answer; but the other laughed, and leaning out of the low cart patted Old Coles upon the shoulder, saying:

"You must not deny yourself the necessities of life. We must look after you and keep you from starvation. Ah, I see you have some oranges," he cried, looking into the disordered cart. "And fish. Mother told me she wanted some fish. Business must be mutual, or it would come to an end. If you want my soap and candles I require your oranges and fish, or I certainly ought to require them. I am going to take a dozen oranges—four a penny, I think, Mr Wreford?"

"Don't ye touch 'em, please, Mr Vid. Penny each be the price, seven vor sixpence, and the best of 'em be vor the little maiden."

Old Coles was wrong, because Vid was picking out the best

for himself, beaming through his spectacles, saying reproachfully: "You wouldn't cheat me, Mr Wreford? I am an old man, but have my wits still, thank God," turning about the rags with his stick to see if there might be anything worth "buying" there, wondering if mother wanted a new scrubbing-brush; while Old Coles stood as helpless as his pony, his head hanging low between two sharp shoulders, and his gnarled hands shaking with the palsy of age and fear. He hated the road, which was much too big and strong for him; he wanted to get right away from it, never see it again, and take his little maiden to some quiet cleave where they could live alone quietly among the rocks and away from the dust. The road was too strong for weak things who couldn't count or spell or reckon and had that dreadful shaking of their hands.

"Oranges be a penny each," he quavered, in a voice which tried to be determined; but George Vid put back his great white head and laughed until the spectacles slipped down his nose.

"That's how you get the better of the farmers. You're a hard man," he cried, rubbing his eyes with his coat-sleeve. "You get the money out of 'em, you squeeze 'em, Mr Wreford, but I can't do it. I take what I can get, and thank God for it. You mustn't try to squeeze me, an old fellow, with dear old mother to think of. Four a penny to a fellow-tradesman, Mr Wreford. Fair play pays in the end, you may be sure. Me and mother believe in honesty, plenty of business and small profits. It's a slow way of making a living, but a sure way. I'll take a little fish," said the old hypocrite. "You deal with me and I deal with you. We have known each other a long time, and there has never been a hard word between us, thank God. A blessed, ah, and a joyful thing, Mr Wreford, to dwell together in unity," he went on, whacking at his pony. "Any nice fresh herrings in the barrel, Mr Wreford? Dear old mother loves a kipper for her tea."

"I wun't be home avore dark, and I ain't got the lamp," said Old Coles, wishing vaguely that the mine would explode and destroy the road, because the whiteness of it made his eyes

ache. "Oh, Mr Vid, yew be taking such a lot of my oranges. I can't spare 'em to ye, I can't. Dree vor penny-halfpenny 'em wur, and such a lot rotten, and the little maid wun't ha' none now."

"You're a funny fellow," laughed George Vid. "Grumbling because business is good. Always sell in the nearest market, my dear." His stick was in the fish barrel raking about the little corpses, while his mischievous eyes searched for something tasty. "Keep the bad ones at the bottom. Ah, you're a man of business, sure enough; but I can't do it, Mr Wreford. My conscience makes me honest, thank God. Pretty little fish these gurnards, but poor eating. I'll take a few of the herring, about twenty, sixpenn'orth shall we say? That will be ninepence I owe you altogether. We will deduct it from the next monthly account," he said magnificently.

Old Coles made no reply. It was small use talking to George Vid, and he required all his energies to deliver the little heap of coal and get home again. He touched up the old pony, and the cart began to creak and stagger; and at the same moment, Vid, leaning over, smiling in his most friendly way, struck the pony with his ash-stick, just to have a little joke with his old friend and to show though his head might be bald his heart was still boyish. The cart swerved as if it must break; the side of it collided with Old Coles, and knocked him flat upon the hard white road. He was hurt, could not move for some time, and all around him were small lumps of precious mineral which had been shaken out of the cart; and overhead the mine was roaring as if the hill upon which it stood was in process of eruption.

George Vid was rocking backwards and forwards in good old-fashioned mirth, and shouting: "We may be old, my dear, but we are still able to enjoy ourselves—thank God," he added with his customary piety.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT THE GARDEN OF THE GIANTS

VEGETABLES and flowers, the best of their kind according to season; such was the impression obtained by looking over the fence which separated the road from the garden of Eli and Oli Rescorla. The cottage was an ordinary one architecturally; a little oblong box, with a stiff chimney at each end, but much more picturesque than its neighbours, because the stones had been covered with roughcast, washed pink, instead of the customary white; the blushing walls underneath the almost black thatch made a warm picture, especially when scarlet wall-flowers were in bloom.

However careless the observer he must have noticed how carefully the aristocratic flowers were divided from the democratic vegetables. The boundary line was a path soft with river sand, and as frontier walls were hedges of box, the sweetly scented variety, and a row of briar-roses known to the brothers as the brimmly hedge. The kingdoms were each as independent as continental nations. The flower garden was ruled by King Eli, while the vegetables owed their allegiance to President Oli.

The cottage was situated high up at Fursdon Head, overlooking the maze of fields which had been taken in by the old squire, and the road before it was not the wide and dusty main where Old Coles and George Vid of the one class and owners of purple and scarlet motor-cars of another class went up and down—tortoise the one and stormy petrel the other; but it was the old road, narrow and badly kept, because its glory had

departed. Once it had carried coaches between Launceston on the hill to Exeter in the pit; but when the steam-engine ceased to be a toy it occurred to the rulers of the land, who were perhaps not quite so wise as Eli and Oli Rescorla, that what was wanted, now that the coaching days were over, was a fine wide road made across Fursdon to shorten the journey between Launceston and Exeter; not a narrow lane filled with rough stones, but a hard, level thoroughfare which it might be a consolation for the post-boys to walk upon and reflect how well the coaches would have run there if the steam-engine hadn't been invented.

Not many vehicles went along the old road which had become merely a means of access to a few cottages. It was covered with soil, and in the early spring the brothers required stepping-stones to their gate. Flower-seeds were carried over the fence, settled in the grass, and the side of the road would have been bright all summer with poppies and cornflowers, only an alert parish council, foreseeing that things of beauty might by some power of evil cause people to sin, sent forth Joseph Boone to reap them all down; not to remove the mud or drain off the water, because these things were not actually vicious, but to clear away everything that blossomed and gave refreshment to the eye; which was another matter to marvel at.

It was the quietest hour of the day, the first of the afternoon, and human life seemed dormant. The door was shut, but upon the sandy path a cat reclined, licking the tip of its tail with almost spiteful energy. This was Tom, keeper of flowers, who enjoyed the official distinction of being mouse-catcher to the court of King Eli, although, when sport was dull, the rascal would scratch up the seeds that he might be able to report if they were sprouting; and beyond the boundary, looking over the box and sitting upright upon a warm and scented bed of shallots with an air of trespassers beware, was another cat, motionless, with right paw uplifted, staring with round eyes of consternation at Tom, as if expecting to see the tip of that tail

licked off at any moment. This spectator was the guardian of the vegetables, the presidential cat, whose name was Ted, which sounded wrong, because Ted had an incurable habit of bringing kittens into the world. The only other living creatures in the garden were bees—Lord Tom and Lady Ted kept the birds outside—and these were hurrying to and fro with a merry music, making the tall wallflowers shake. A row of old-fashioned hives stood beneath the warm hedge behind the pink human hive. The bees teased the cats sometimes, hovering in front of their faces quoting Solomon on industry. Tom continued the lubrication of his tail unmoved, but Ted had no patience with the insects and slashed out with her paw. Sometimes she knocked one down into an undignified attitude upon its back. She would regard it wonderingly, sniff at it, sneeze, and then the bee would right itself and fly away humming a philippic against grimalkins.

The place was so peaceful that it seemed a mistake to have two-legged creatures, artificially clothed, trampling there in abnormal boots; but after all these creatures had made the place pretty. There would have been no pink walls without them, no garden, nothing except a waste of rock and ferns; even the cats and bees would not have been there; and outside the fence was a suppliant robin hopping to and fro, making ambassadorial noises, very anxious to enter into an alliance with Tom and Ted, because the worms of that garden were tender, only they would not consider his diplomatic advances. Be sure that pleasant people lived there, folk worth knowing because of their garden. Judge a tenant of the house by the flowers outside it, by their number and variety, by the care bestowed upon them, by the presence or absence of noxious weeds. If the verdict be favourable it is not necessary to search beyond the door.

A girl was coming up the road—it was either up or down in Fursdon—a slim girl, with a pale face but fine complexion, honest eyes, plenty of dark hair; and she had very small feet and hands, excellent things in a girl, and a soft voice singing

with the bees as she came along. She looked a nice girl, a pretty little lady, although some people would have said she was hardly beautiful, and not quite a lady; but then others said Patience Starke was exceedingly pretty, and if beauty is simply a matter of pink and white no doubt they were right. Beauty is not a thing which is easy to see; it has to make itself felt.

Edith Gribbin was singing as she came up the road, because it was spring, and she was glad to be out. At home she was a prisoner, but in the sunshine all are free. She was not troubling herself just then as to whether she was a lady, although, if she had met the croquet-player, who was generally called Horatio Hosken, a gentleman beyond all question, also referred to as the rector, she might have considered the question, as he would have smiled in a luscious way and have raised his left hand to the level of his eyes. To real ladies the rector swept off his hat with his right hand, using the left for a scooping action of self-abasement; but the position of Miss Gribbin entitled her to nothing more than an act of recognition. True, her father had been a clergyman, but a curate only, and one who had brought disgrace upon the brotherhood by publicly rebuking his vicar for having preached an obituary sermon upon a wealthy parishioner, who had led a singularly dissolute life, but had gilded it by filling the church with brass and woodwork, and by heading every subscription list with a figure nobody else could hope to beat, extolling the departed with every kind of laudatory adjective, forcing all the virtues upon his memory, and concluding with the accepted phrases, "May our last end be like his," and "We shall never see his like again." To which the curate had replied, "It will be a very good thing if we don't."

On the whole Edith guessed she was not a young lady, because of those queer notions she had inherited from her father, her poverty, and the fact that she was companion to Mrs Allen, who was also her aunt by marriage, although this was not openly recognised, and Mrs Allen had desired her not

to use the word which suggested a relationship. It was a queer position to be in, not to know her own place in the world. She was not a servant, because she was allowed to feed with Mrs Allen and went into society with her to a certain extent; but she was ordered about like a servant, and received less pay, had to obtain permission to leave the house, and was under orders to return at a certain time, and if she proved disobedient it was likely she would get her ears boxed. Poor Edith, her ears were so small and nice. Had she been an heiress, Mrs Allen would have regarded them as perfect; but she was a pauper, and that father had been always such a fool.

Edith was not wearing gloves. They were not really necessary in the country; besides, she was carrying a parcel which might have soiled them. She was accustomed to carrying parcels, as Mrs Allen often went shopping, though on such occasions she liked Edith to walk just a little behind her, to be handy when required. But the brown-paper parcel she was carrying then was her own business.

"Oh, pussy, dear!" cried Edith as she stopped at the gate.

Tom looked up with that acid expression which endless generations of tom-cats have succeeded in bringing to a fine art; but Ted, in a friendly, motherly way, jumped over the briars and converted the girl into a rubbing-post.

"Nobody about, except pussy-cats," said she; and then knocked at the door, bending and listening, because she knew there were generally funny things to be heard when the brothers were awakened.

Nailed boots sliding upon concrete made the first answer; and then a voice, soft and genial, "I be the furthest from the door, so I'll go."

"Bide quiet, my dear," said another voice, drawling more than the first, but equally soft. "I be older than yew, so I'll go."

"I wonder if that was Oli or Eli," murmured Edith.

"Yew went to the door last time," said voice number one.

"I b'ain't sure on't. Nobody ain't been vor two days and two nights," replied number two.

"Squire Vivian comed Thursday afternoon, day I tilled the marrowfats."

"Day I picked the seeds off the rosydendrums."

"That wur Friday, my dear."

"Twur Thursday. I runned the awl into my thumb."

Judging by the voices two old women were upon the other side of the door. After a short interval the drawling voice remarked, "I fancy us wur mistook. Nobody b'ain't outside."

"It be the two old Simple-Simons racketing," said the other voice, referring to the cats.

Edith tittered, knocked again in a decided fashion, and four boots went sliding over the concrete. The door opened, a fine face appeared, dignified, almost handsome; and then the body appeared, the straight wiry body of a man well advanced in life, but retaining great physical strength; a strong, simple, kindly giant who thought well of weaker folk and cultivated vegetables. He was Oli.

"I have brought you a pair of boots," said Edith. "I hope they are not too bad."

"I'll call my little brother," said Oli, smiling in a delightful way.

It did not appear necessary, but the brothers were united; nothing could be said or done to the one unless the other was present.

"My dear, here be a young lady wi' a pair o' butes."

Eli had placed the best chair in the middle of the room, and was polishing the seat with his leather apron. Suddenly the giant at the door appeared to become two-headed; a second head started from his shoulder, so exactly like the first one that for a moment the girl really wondered if she was seeing double.

"Yew ha' come to see my wallflowers?" the second giant at once suggested.

"Well, I came to bring you a pair of boots to mend," laughed Edith.

The brothers in their kindly way supposed that the boots

were only put forward as an excuse for a friendly visit; they welcomed the little job, but it could not be allowed to take precedence over the garden. It was no use Edith saying she had seen the flowers. That was impossible until Eli had pointed them out to her and given her the history of their growth from seed to perfection. Oli remained upon the neutral ground of the path, having no jurisdiction over the flowers; but Tom accompanied his master, and did the honours of the floricultural section by purring welcome in a profound bass, and kneading away with his front paws, as if he was trying to convert the soft soil into a gift of small loaves of bread.

Then it was Oli's turn, although there was little to be seen upon his territory, but he could not consider the boots until Edith had been shown where the beans and the marrowfats had been sown and had listened to forecasts regarding their size and excellence; and here Ted arose and purred the romance of her mousiad and told how the foe had been driven from the field.

It was a pleasant picture, these strong giants with their simple language and innocent faces revealing the treasures of their gardens to the girl; and the all-wise bees added a natural touch—deceive a dog, a horse, or easiest of all a fellow-creature, but you can't deceive a bee—and down they flew upon the twin brethren, settling upon their heads with caressing motions of their wings; while the old fellows laughed and their eyes shone through the cloud of insects as they assured Edith that none of them had a sting for her.

"I think you must be good men," she cried, then flushed and scolded herself for being so impulsive.

The brothers looked at each other with some bewilderment; they didn't understand, because the question of good and evil was never discussed by them. They were natural; they loved one another, their cats and their garden; they couldn't help it, no effort was required, they only obeyed their instincts, so how could they be good?

"I am sure you have no enemies," said Edith hurriedly.

Then the brothers smiled merely and knew how to answer.

"Brimmles," said Eli, and Oli added his comment, "Pull 'em up, and 'em grows again."

"Docks," said Eli.

"Little or big there's no beating 'em," said Oli.

"Nettles."

"More yew pulls 'em the faster 'em spreads."

"Goose-grass," concluded Eli, and his brother added, "The wickedest heathen of 'em all."

"Us ha' four enemies," said Eli triumphantly.

"I wouldn't mind them," she murmured, thinking of other brambles and nettles. "Now you must look at my boots, please. I have a long walk before me," said Edith, wondering what these two mighty men would say if they knew she had to be back at a certain time.

A bunch of scarlet wallflowers had to be picked and presented with a soft "yew'm welcome." The bees settled upon the flowers while the girl was expressing her thanks for them, but they were gentle bees, except when Ted knocked them about. Then Edith was ushered into the living-room, entreated to sit down. The boots were produced, and the brothers became solemn as details were discussed. It was absurd to see these giants handling the tiny boots, but the fingers of each were deft. The boots were not past repairing. Oli declared they would look as good as new when he and his little brother had done with them, and the little brother concurred as he lifted the bubbling kettle from the faggot-wood. "The lady will tak' a cup of tea, my dear," he said.

"Oh no, thank you very much; please don't bother"; but what was the use of talking? For Oli was on his knees before a worm-eaten cupboard, carefully extracting a cup and saucer which had defied accidents for many a generation, saying apologetically, "Us ain't got no woman."

"Who does the house work?"

"Me and my young brother."

"Then the cobbling and the garden," she mused; but Eli

reminded her, in his gentle voice, "Days be long, if yew uses 'em."

"It is good of you," she murmured, as the pleasant odour of tea brewing entered the homely room, reflecting that the brothers were giving her what would have cost sixpence at an inn, and they would be offended if she refused or suggested payment, though the repairs to her boots would probably not cost more; and trying not to believe she was happier there than in Mrs Allen's drawing-room. "But you are so alike," she laughed. "I cannot tell who is who, and your names are so alike."

The brothers were standing beside the rough table greatly interested in all she said, and Oli had his hand on Eli's shoulder. There was no show in this; it was all natural.

"There wur meant to be dree of us," said Eli. "The first vaither called Levi, but he wur took. Then I comed——"

"Me!" interrupted Oli.

"Us b'ain't certain which comed first, but I reckons 'twur me."

"Us be allus a-fighting," exclaimed Oli, patting the other gently.

"I reckons it be certain I comed before my little brother, 'cause o' the name. I wur called Eli, and if he'd comed first he'd ha' been called Eli, vor vaither said he and mother wur hard put to it to find another name. They searched the buke vor days till 'em found Oli, but Eli of course comed to 'em natural. Howsomever, vaither didn't know which of us wur the eldest, and mother wouldn't say."

"I fancies her wur never sure on't naythur," said Oli.

"Vaither wur a pious man, and he said how it comed to him like a blow to find how little he knew o' the buke when he comes across the name Oli."

"There he be," said Oli, pointing to a large brown mass of a volume upon the dresser. "Our names be wrote in him, though 'em be got a bit worn like; and us hopes our names will be wrote in him vor ever and ever," he added simply.

Presently Edith was ushered to the gate recessionally by the brothers, their cats, and bees innumerable. Directly she was out of sight Eli pulled off his coat, flung it across the gate, and, turning to his brother, shouted, "Now I be agwaine to learn ye a lesson, my dear!"

"What ha' I done?" demanded Oli, with twinkling eyes, also removing his coat and licking his finger-tips.

"I saw yew kick my old cat," replied Eli.

"Yew'm a liar!" came the joyful answer.

"Yew'm a coward! Yew ha' run away from me many a time. I've half a mind to throw ye in the brimmly hedge."

"I've a mind to bump your head upon the path," said Oli, scowling.

That was about the only point upon which the brothers differed. Eli had always half a mind to do a thing, while Oli had a whole one. It was just a little matter of temperament which distinguished them, and made them separate beings. Eli was so accustomed to mentioning his half-mind, that he occasionally carried the idea too far and left a thing undone, and Oli of the whole mind had to see to it.

"I wur never beat but once, and that wur foul," boasted Eli.

"I've beat yew hundreds o' times," replied Oli scornfully. "Watch yourself, my dear. I be coming to ye."

The next moment the brothers were fighting on the sandy path, while Tom and Ted sat upon opposite sides with eyes of horror, and the bees flew about in disorder, humming the information that the masters were going to murder one another, sure enough. At a distance the spectacle was somewhat terrific, the struggle looked real, the big men were so strong, and nobody would have dreamed that this was only a little way they had of recalling their past exploits and keeping themselves in good condition. Both had been famous wrestlers in their prime, before the sport had become degraded, and several times each week they insulted each other and fought upon the path. It was the object of Oli to throw Eli through the briar hedge into his flower garden, and sundry gaps testified to the

fact that the feat had been accomplished; while to secure the victory, Eli had to fling Oli upon his vegetables. The victor had for his reward the pleasure of watching the loser making good the damage, also of jeering at him for a beaten and degraded object.

Any stranger witnessing that struggle might have gone away with the idea that Eli and Oli Rescorla were brutes, and it would have been something of a revelation to behold them later on, sitting over the teapot like two old women, talking softly about roses and onions, and calling each other "my dear" in a thoroughly genuine way.

The brothers had a spotted reputation, because of their bloodthirsty ways and what was regarded as the looseness of their lives. They had no fixed principles, it was said. They were always grinning at each other, and playing the fool, or departing suddenly to distant parts of the country without any healthy motive. No shepherd claimed them; they were wild sheep roaming in the wilderness. Broad-mindedness was not comprehended in Fursdon parish, and although the brothers attended church and chapels the complaint went up that they were hardly narrow enough to secure salvation. One Sunday they would appear in the parish church, side by side, sharing a borrowed hymn-book, and neither neglected to drop a penny in the bag with the manner of a cheerful giver; the next Sunday they would be at the Wesleyan chapel, the following among the Bible Christians. They went everywhere, seeing and finding out all they could, although these wanderings were not accounted unto them for righteousness. It was their duty to belong to a party, to have a definite creed, to follow a certain leader, and worship whatever idol it might please him to set up. Thinking for oneself was a form of blasphemy, according to the neighbours. Guardians had been appointed to show the right way, as sign-posts enlightening others, but themselves remaining motionless. Eli and Oli were too strong to submit to discipline. They liked to be masters of themselves, and to act as they had half a mind or a mind to. Had there been a

Buddhist temple erected in the village they would have attended that too. They were anxious to learn as much as they could, and would have argued, sensibly enough, that any religion which was able to attract the love and sympathy of wise men must have some good in it.

There was no definite conclusion to the wrestling-match that day, and when time was agreed upon both were sprawling upon the path. They got up, went to the back of the garden where a heap of sand was kept to conceal the marks of these gladiatorial contests, while the cats accompanied them to discuss the possibility of a nestful of succulent sparrows in the hedge behind the beehives.

"I beat ye on points," reminded Eli.

"I could ha' downed yew easy, if I'd been a bit younger," replied Oli.

"I'd ha' been younger tu," said Eli.

"I've beat ye on travels, my dear."

Eli looked downcast. That fact could not be disputed. His brother had been into regions which Eli had never explored, and he made up his mind, or rather half of it, to take out the old map and look for some place upon the big road which would introduce him to a country which Oli had never even heard of. The sporting spirit was so strong in the brothers that it made them rivals; one day wrestling, another travelling against the other; and in the garden a continual struggle as to the number of prizes they could win at the village show. But the spirit of animosity never entered.

When the path was smooth again they returned to the cottage. Eli placed the cobbler's stool in the centre of the floor, Oli brought out the roll of leather, the tools, and the ironstone; both old men put on their spectacles. Recreation was over, and now it was time for work. Had the brothers been ordered to sit down and repair Edith's boots they would not have done so; something in their nature would have compelled them to rebel, but as they could command themselves they sat down cheerfully.

It was dark early in the cottage, because the windows were small, and heavy eaves jutted over them, causing a steady drip on wet days. Eli left the stool, lighted the lamp, then came forward to draw the blind. He stooped rather towards evening, and the keen brown face became a trifle haggard. Oli heaped more faggot-wood upon the hearthstone and suspended the kettle from the crook, while Tom and Ted purred to see the twigs glowing. It was all very quiet outside, as the bees had crawled home dead tired. If all the work that these men had done could have been piled up it would have made a mountain, and if all their evil deeds had been added as a cairn nobody would have noticed much. It was a good record; theirs was a chronicle of small deeds. They knew little, they had made up their minds upon nothing. But it was a pleasant little room behind the pink wall.

CHAPTER IV

ABOUT STONES

THERE was music on the moor. It began about an hour after sunrise and continued all the day, a wild mysterious music, which travelled far. Eyes searched in vain for the performer. Such an insignificant object could not be seen against the great slope of rocks. The noise that he made went out on every side, but the maker remained out of sight, the same colour as the moor, a patch of it in body, and he drew the music out of granite with iron and had played the same tune for sixty years—Will Yeo, the father of Mark.

When that large tract of moorland snatched by Squire Fursdon became common to the parishioners, fields were claimed by marking them out with rows of stones. Thereafter they became the property of the men so marking them. Will Yeo's father had marked out several, but had done no more; and when he died his son began to play the Hercules—to clear that land which was there like a granite quarry, to blast and remove each boulder, to build the walls, eradicate the furze, heather, and ferns, drain the land, and finally to cultivate it. The task seemed impossible for a man working single-handed, and even when accomplished the land would have hardly any value. The difficulty of reaching it was great, and the furious gales played havoc with a crop; and yet Will Yeo had devoted the whole of his life to fighting granite.

He who makes a living by his wits might want to know the reason, but if Dartmoor answered him he would hardly understand. There was the intoxicating fascination of a gigantic

work in which strength alone could serve, with just a little cunning added. There was the wild music made by the iron and stone to be listened to through life; chief of all the privilege of being out alone every day subduing a force, while looking over what appeared to be the whole world stretched below, with the keen winds tossing the clouds along, and strange voices coming out of the nooks and corners—that was to live and not know weakness.

Every morning Will left Freezabeer, his house beside the bog, with a reed basket looped about his neck and his two dogs trotting behind. These dogs were his companions, and they sat upon the rocks all day while the master worked, and at night they cuddled beside the old man and kept him warm. It took twenty minutes to walk up to the plats, as Will called them, and then the tools were taken out of their hole, the jumper, tears, feathers, and big hammer with a keen edge and a blunt edge and thick handle three feet long. Soon the music began. Will approached the rock which was to be fought, after removing his coat and spitting on his hands, and standing across it, with jumper deftly poised, brought the bar down to strike the opening note; again and again, the point always striking the same spot, until a hole was made half-full of milky dust. So skilfully was the bar balanced that it seemed to have no weight, and at every stroke it rebounded from the rock, threw up the old man's arms, and he had nothing to do but bring them down and make the bar leap again. That was the reason it was called a jumper. Will puffed his red cheeks to blow the dust out, then introduced the feathers into the holes, small strips of thin metal these, a set of three went into each hole; and when they were in position the tears were inserted, round pointed wedges of iron which were to rend the rock asunder. "Where be thikky hammer?" Will would cry, the question giving him an excuse to pause and spit on his hands before seizing the great weapon, which resembled a double-edged axe, swinging it over his head and bringing it down to ring changes upon the tears with the blunt edge,

alternated with blows upon the granite between the tears with the keen edge; and so on until with a grumbling murmur the granite fell apart. Some rocks would be rotten, resembling, when broken, a birthday cake of chocolate and almond, and these crumbled; most of them were tough, grey, and glittering, and the hammer bounded off with a ring and without a mark; and when they gave way at length they fell in slices, but not before they had drawn sweat from the man's forehead like a thunder-shower. Will could always tell the size of a rock, however deeply its mass lay hidden. He would tap it with the hammer lightly, and say, "He'm a big un," or "He'll come out." Even when there was nothing but a small black snout protruding from the peat he could tell how much was underneath by tapping.

This was play, not real work, not fighting, although the man who lived by his wits would not love to swing that hammer all the day. Work began when those masses had to be stirred, dug out of their peaty beds, rolled or carried to take their places in the wall. To the man who carries granite all other work is mere amusement. It was a fight. Wounds were inflicted on both sides, and the granite was not always vanquished. Dead bodies had been carried from those fields of rock. It seemed presumptuous for such soft stuff as human flesh, bleeding from a furze-prickle, torn by the smallest bramble, to strive against stone, and the victory was not to be won without losses. Such fragile stuff could not win by strength unaided; it had to employ cunning and enter into alliance with iron; even as men when they fight as nations employ steel and gunpowder, knowing how soft and easily scratched they are, and shrinking from the finer method of coming to handgrips. By cunning the granite was overcome, but it left its marks. The great scar in the peat, showing where the solid body had rested, could be removed, but the scars it inflicted were permanent; and all the men who had cleared a field and surrounded it with walls had something to show of the granite's vengeance; and even the iron turned against them sometimes,

and the other ally dynamite was treacherous; so that many a fighter fell out sick and dazed, stone-deaf, or seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

They thought themselves masters of iron and dynamite, they became careless, while the allies remained constant. Old Will had lost one eye and the sight of the other was not clear. His right hand was a brown knob, with a thumb attached, the fingers had been blown away, and his face was scarred and pitiful. He was an old soldier, still seeing active service, though he had never wounded a fellow-creature or an animal, only the granite which had struck back and changed his outward body; and he never asked himself whether the sixty years' war was a glorious thing, because he knew it was; the reward was worth it, though at first sight it was nothing except to be able to point out those fields and say "They'm mine." But to Will there was much more, neither medals nor honour nor pension, but the satisfaction of work, the good memory of years of struggling with the rocks, the subjection of grey boulders, the rising of the walls, the peril of storms, the facing of snow and sleet, the endurance of heat, not to gain money, for the field reclaimed was worth nothing except a pound or two, but with the prospect of finishing the task some day, of knowing he had done it; and while the fight was on there was the music of the jumper, and those other sounds which Will did not tell about, those voices which came from the rocks when they were opened, and the soft music of the wind instruments, which were not visible and yet they must have been there, otherwise old Will would not have stopped and stood leaning upon the bar to listen.

Cynical folk might have asked, "What's the old fool doing?" and if Will overheard he had not the wit to answer, because he was slow of speech and very silent. If it was a waste of time to break the rocks it was at least making him wise; for he was working, and work means wisdom. He was a wise man, only he was inarticulate; no star fell from heaven to lighten his mind and reveal what those years of toil had written there.

Ten o'clock was lunch-time, and the dogs would awake when the reed basket appeared. Will was at work all the time he was eating, scanning what he had done and preparing plans for the next campaign. When the hooter of the mine announced mid-day he stopped, the tools were laid aside, and he tramped home to Freezabeer, where his daughter Annie had a good dinner awaiting; but he was never long away from the field of battle, and the jumper went on ringing until evening. Will tried to reach home before dark, as there were bogs to be crossed and he could not see well. Another good meal, then an account of the day's progress in exceedingly broad dialect; and after that it was bedtime. Old Will looked forward to bed. He climbed the stairs, and presently Annie would hear herself called. "Well, dad?" she answered.

"Best place I've been in all day."

But the granite remained with the old man in his sleep. Directly he closed his eyes he could see the plat exactly as he had left it, the last boulder split, with its sides gleaming and the dust scattered about the cleavages; and immediately he awoke he arranged with himself where he would start and what should be done that day.

Not long after Mark's departure to Love Lane there came a break in the music. A boulder had to be scattered by a charge of dynamite, and Old Will was more careless than usual. He was thinking of his son, who had not the strength to move mountains, and worrying about him a little, as he did not like the idea of a free and independent Yeo working for a master. He was not afraid of dynamite, which was his ally, so he began his musical drama with the jumper, making the hole where the charge was to be placed; but all the time he was thinking of Mark, trusting he would do well in the world, and his mind was only half given to the boulder and the weapons of war.

Fortunately he had a companion, though Old Will was daring enough to blast alone. Job Lithern came that way. He too had succumbed to the fascination of that fight, and his life also had been given to the taking in of fields, though in

other respects he and Old Will had nothing in common, for the one was a large-hearted man, while Job had made himself the equal of the rats by living among them and preferring them to the human race. He was a dreadful creature in appearance, with his hideous face and mouth always open, showing one wolf-like fang, and he would terrify strangers by lifting his awful head over a wall—he always appeared to be squatting beneath some wall, indifferent to snow or rain—casting out his arms and bellowing furiously. He was a gentle animal really, and only bellowed because he was stone-deaf; but it made him angry to see soft creatures who had never lifted a block of granite strutting about his Dartmoor. They had no right there, walking upon his sacred ground and stealing the air which was his property. Being absolutely deaf he did not know that his shoutings made no intelligible words; only a tempest of noise which frightened people, who supposed they were dealing with a madman.

Job looked over the wall and bellowed, and somehow Will knew what he was saying, though his tongue had lost the trick of making words.

"I be a tearing the pluffy trade," he answered.

Ivy and moss which had gathered over the black boulder were the pluffy trade. Old Will was one of the last to talk broad dialect. Fifty years hence the language must be as dead as Cornish, for the growing generation regard it with scorn, and Will was despised and laughed at by superior young folk, because he knew no better.

Job Lithern bellowed.

Will twisted his pick into a mass of polypoddies, with the remark, "Vern-drum trade."

It sounded gibberish, but no doubt the word *drum* had been used in such connection once upon a time, for it was often in Will's mouth when he wanted to explain the idea of stuff which was in the way. Job could not hear, but he understood and went on roaring; a quaint dialogue, obsolete words on one side and inarticulate noise upon the other.

Then the dynamite spoke, and that day victory went to the granite. The charge exploded too soon. Job dodged instinctively, but poor old Will fell flat; a piece of stone had struck him. He did not rise, and the noise of Job became like a storm-wind and a cataract.

"I be tored abroad," was all the old man said before he became unconscious.

The field was silent, a curtain of mist descended, the instruments of music were not heard for many months, the jumper and hammer were dumb, and the conductor went away for a holiday. If the battle is to the strong so are the wounds.

Job ran for assistance, and brought it like a dog with howls and tuggings; and on a hurdle obtained from one of the fields they carried Old Will home. The doctor came and did his best, then sent to distant Exeter, and the next day an ambulance came over the hills and carried Will away into the new and delicate world of the hospital; for the wound in his leg was grievous, not like a clean sword-thrust or a neat bullet hole. When the granite strikes it tears.

Will was miserable in the hospital, fretting and grumbling, and earning for himself the title of an ungrateful old man, which he was not, but his soul yearned for the rocks. He was like the wounded soldier, anxious to be healed and at the front again; and because he worried, the wound did not close, and the doctors decided at last it would be necessary to graft a piece of skin upon the place to make it whole.

When Will was told of this he became excited and talked strangely. He couldn't understand quite what was meant, but apparently he had to borrow a portion of skin from somebody. Then, of course, Mark must be sent for. He had used his son's boots while his own were drying in the cloam-oven and his son's coat when his own was undergoing repairs, therefore, if a portion of human body was required, Mark would supply it; but Will let it be plainly understood that he disapproved of such ways.

Mark was sent for, came, and a doctor examined him and

suggested it would be better to find someone else. "This man hasn't got a sound organ in his body," he told his colleagues; but the Yeos were both determined.

"Me, or no one," said Mark; while Old Will called defiantly from his bed, "He'm the strongest man on earth, 'cept me, his old vaither"; and added, "if it b'ain't Mark, it mun be an old bullock," which made the men of medicine laugh.

The operation was performed, and proved the doctors in the wrong, for Mark recovered rapidly; while his father, supposing that some enchantment had been worked, did likewise, although he was continually bothering the doctors with questions as to what he was to do with the piece of grafted skin when his leg was all right, and whether it was to be returned to Mark before they left the hospital or afterwards. He could not grasp the fact that it had become his property altogether. It seemed to destroy his individuality, and what would happen when they rose on the last day, would that piece of skin be required of him then?

"Don't you worry about the last day. That's a long way off," said a frivolous nurse.

One day a young man came into the ward, a mere boy in spite of his clerical clothes, a tall, pale-faced boy, with fluffy hair and beautiful woman's eyes, and he sat down upon old Will's bed, and talked so nicely it made the old fellow feel comfortable. Somehow he understood this young man; there was something in the nature of each which met and kissed; and Will chatted happily about his plats and the granite, and the boy showed he knew all about jumpers, tears, and feathers; and when Will was drawn out to tell about the voices and that other music, the Æolian music, the young clergyman nodded and said he understood that too.

"What be mun?" asked Will, but the other could not say, and only answered, "I'll take you into the cathedral before you go home. You hear it there sometimes, but not like you do on Dartmoor."

Mark turned—he had been half asleep—and he and the

young man looked at each other, and Gerard Spiller, the curate, got up and walked across to him; and for one instant it seemed to Mark as if he was alone in the world, and outside there was a noise as of a half-mad crowd trying to get at him. Perhaps the accident to Old Will was not all an accident. It might have been necessary to bring Mark into the hospital, and the accident was the easiest way of bringing that about. It was the granite which brought these two young men together.

"Getting on all right?" said Spiller.

"Yes, thank ye. 'Tis nought," said Mark.

Fursdon was greatly stirred, not by the accident, which was a common event, but by what was regarded as Mark's heroic conduct; and when he returned to the uncongenial duties of Love Lane a little surprise awaited him. Squire Vivian had arranged it out of the generosity of his heart, and the rector heartily concurred on the understanding that he was not to be bothered with any preliminary details. One day there came a summons to Will and Mark to attend at the old Tithe Barn near Fursdon Head that evening; and, as this was in the nature of a command, they went, without any knowledge as to what was going to happen.

The barn was crowded, chiefly with women and youngsters, but at one end stood Vivian and the rector, with a few of the bigger farmers wearing that unhappy look which was a sure sign of speech-making and a ceremony; and here a small box was being passed from hand to hand as gingerly as if it had contained some poisonous reptile. When the Yeos appeared cheers and stamping began, which Hosken presently put a stop to by uplifting his hand, and then the men who were to be honoured were conducted to the front and had to endure congratulations and hand-shakings, while Hosken made foolish efforts to prevent the box he was holding from becoming too obtrusive. It was all rather vulgar, though probably only one man in the place found it so.

Hosken made his speech, alluding first of all to the

generosity of the landed proprietors in that district, afterwards to the duties of sons towards their parents, which he feared were not sufficiently recognised in these days; and then he begged Mark to accept a handsome silver watch, which had been bought by public subscription and bore an inscription which the rector read in a melodramatic manner: "Presented to Mark Yeo as a token of the filial affection shown by him towards his father"; while Vivian muttered, "Bad grammar, as usual," and the intended recipient became white as that whistling, and stamping broke out again behind.

"I can't tak' it, sir," he said.

There was a horrible silence all at once, while the great men began to look uncomfortable.

"I think you hardly understand," began Hosken in a haughty voice.

"I du, sir. If I'd done any gude to a stranger I wouldn't mind having the watch, but I can't tak' nought vor doing a little bit o' duty to my old vaither. 'Tis natural. I don't see how anyone ha' got a right to come between him and me."

"Mark be right, master," said Old Will. "No man mun come atween I and he."

"Don't be a fool," said Vivian amiably.

"Sell 'en, and give the money to the hospital," said Mark, who was acting foolishly and in anger. "I wun't ha' it. Come along home, vaither," he muttered.

The ceremony became therefore a complete failure, and everybody wanted to get outside at the same time and talk about it. This was the first of those incautious speeches by which Mark made enemies.

"Those Yeos are savages," the rector muttered.

CHAPTER V

ABOUT THE FRANKIN DAYS

MARK'S visit to the hospital brought him to the turning-point. The road which had led him into a wild upland became from that point many-headed; and there he was lost. Had it not been for the accident he might have continued at Love Lane; but the changed mind, the curate, and a certain other visitor, made him consider his position, and feel his helplessness as he reflected upon those lanes branching out on every side, all of them tempting, but closed to him by reason of his position in life. Without a hand to help him up he would have to remain down.

The other visitor was Mrs Allen, according to the hospital authorities, although Mark did not notice her, and she regarded him as a butterfly might regard a cockroach, but Edith was with her as beast of burden and a help in time of need; and Edith had a trick of bringing flowers, giving them to the patients, and saying something cheerful. She had never seen Mark before, but he recognised her, and when she brought him a simple bunch of primroses with the remark, "The lanes are lovely with them now," he tried to tell her that he came from those lanes, but could not. He thought of little but Edith afterwards, not as young men usually think of girls, because she was not of his life, but he thought of her manner, her kindness; she would be accessible, and might help him if he dared to ask. The hand from the clouds to lift him up might be the one which had been full of primroses.

Mark was the first to leave the hospital, and he saw Gerard Spiller no more; but Old Will saw him. True to his promise

the curate came and took him to the cathedral. It was the time of evensong. They sat far back, though the great building was practically empty, for the service did not appear to attract a congregation, and Will peered about with his one dim eye wondering if those walls were built of Dartmoor granite, and how long it had taken the workmen to crack the stones; and presently he observed, "I'd knock mun abroad wi' my hammer in dree years." The psalms were being chanted, and the droning noise annoyed Old Will. But his eye caught a glimpse of further depths, and he muttered, "Four," and then it was five, and so he went on reckoning all through the service how long it would take him to knock the cathedral down; and by the time the choir filed out he had decided he would require some dynamite to help him.

"Do you like it?" Spiller whispered.

"Proper lot o' stoanes," answered Will. "I ha' as many in my plats, though."

"Heard any of those voices?"

The old man shook his head for several moments and went on talking about the granite, which was the only thing that interested him, declaring that "me and Job Lithern" had between them more than enough to build a bigger place than "thikky."

But when the choir had departed the sound of the organ changed, and there crept along the walls and under the roof those sounds which make sensitive beings shiver with a pleasure which is nearly pain. The cathedral was as lonely as the plats, and the eternal fascination of twilight through stained glass windows was present like a deity passing through, whispering gently. Spiller looked at his companion. Will's body had collapsed, his head was lying upon his shoulder as if he slept, and his sound hand clutched his knee.

"I ha' heard mun avore," he muttered.

"Where?"

"Dimsy. Out o' the rocks. Let me bide," said Old Will crossly.

There he sat, thinking he was on the plats again, except when the organ sounded a note which did not come out of the rocks. Then he would look up and declare something had gone wrong ; but directly the right note was sounded his body collapsed again, and the ear which heard best was uplifted towards the roof.

All sorts of facts were written upon his mind, but they were not legible ; he could not read them, and it was a long way from the mind to the tongue. All the wisdom of the world might have been written there, and the music passing across the record made it stir, not into consciousness, far less into expression, but to a knowledge that something was there ; as the unborn child may know somehow life is in it though it cannot speak. All the madness of genius might have been burning in that scarred old body, but the flames could not break out ; there was no outlet, no training of the power of speech, no mechanical trick of writing or reading, no exercise of the faculties. The old man was dumb, but the travail went on within him while the music lasted.

Possibly the noblest minds that the world has produced have been low down and spent themselves dumbly on the earth ; such as Will, having nothing to strike his soul except the wind, and even then not knowing where the treasure was, wholly unconscious that there was a God within him being carried and buried at last in some poor grave. Yet something could be handed on. Men of genius who use their powers to the uttermost are sterile ; they breed no children, live only in themselves, exhaust their reproductive powers by use of intellect. Will had a son who might be articulate and able to intercept the messages discharged towards the tablet of the father's mind. Genius, what is it but the power of being able to read? No respecter of birth it chooses the cottage gladly, hiding in the rags of a tinker, loving the hovel, the ploughland, the grimed and smoky roof. It is a personality, a living creature, a greater than man in man, a reading master, an angel of kindness and a tyrant of cruelty, smiling at the pupil

one time, scourging him another; and as the body comes to its power with years it hears the master always teaching, never at rest, speaking with a distinct voice, unfolding pictures without end, and the amanuensis cannot keep pace with this tyrant who hurries him on with, "See this," and "See that," working while the body sleeps, showing portions of the way and work of life which are still far ahead, planning out the whole life right up to the end, giving everything eagerly, if with pain, when the time comes. That is genius, the power which works not for the man but against him. No labour can make what is not there. Application makes a man able to learn but not to teach, and if the master be absent no learning will call him, just as without learning—or great tribulation—he cannot be awakened; for genius is nothing but the power of reading what has been written upon the mind in an unknown tongue; and without a Daniel the writing cannot be interpreted; and Chaldæans and astrologers will strive in vain.

Mark came back to Love Lane during the Frankin days. Patience had gone to Plymouth, and in an agony of loneliness he wrote to her. Temperance had been married during his absence, and was now cooking and drudging in the cottage at Blue Violet, while Timothy rolled in and out for meals and spent his evenings down Fursdon town, in the den of Lions, because the novelty of being married had worn off in a week. Mark was glad he had not been at the wedding. Timothy Mosscrop was a good fellow, a strong workman; his fellows liked him, his employer would have given him the best of characters; and yet he presented himself for the wedding ceremony somewhat under the influence of liquor, and before the day was over it had mastered him completely. The contrast between his condition and the wild-rose prettiness of his wife, his bleared and silly face and her shy smile, his beer-stained clothes and her simple white dress smelling of lavender, occurred to no one; but Mark would have noticed it.

When he returned the struggle began. Loneliness, immaturity, blindness, perplexity—there were many things to

make the burning youth mad. Every young fellow with a mind walks through hell when he feels the pains of manhood, and is called to make his choice with pleasure on one side, duty on the other, and a fog between; whichever he chooses that fog must be groped through. Everything is hopeless during that stage of growth. All light is cut off, and damnation is the only thing assured; and so the struggle goes on until he has made a kind of choice in desperation, and then the fog clears, the light comes back, and he goes to good or evil; in either case his mind is settled, and that madness never comes again.

During those Frankin days Mark was a man in chains among the tombs, scarcely heeding what he said; and the days added to his spiritual misery, and the old Faust-like myth pressed heavily upon him; how that the fabled brewer, when he perceived that people preferred to get drunk on cider rather than with his beer, signed away his soul to the devil for the consideration that the apple-blossom should be blasted every year by frost. It was a vile tale, and a brutal mind had conceived it. The apple-blossom was the loveliest thing in the land, and it was to be destroyed because it led to crime, to poverty and dirt, misery and madness, destroyed in order that something worse might take its place. The orchard was pitted against the barley-field by the cunning and cupidity of man; whichever won, money passed, and souls as well. And the human mind was capable of conceiving a story of the man who gave himself cheerfully to perdition so that many of his fellow-creatures might dwell in want and join him at the end. For that was how the story ended when carried to its logical conclusion. Could not the same mind conceive another story concerning the beauty of the orchard, the wonderful spring-fall of blossom in a mist of pink and white, the barley-field bending before the wind like the ripples of a golden robe, and the hop-gardens full of perfume and old dreams; or was that too simple a story for strong flesh?

At last Mark made up his mind to try and speak with Edith.

He would not have been so bold had he been less troubled. He discovered that she walked alone most afternoons, and generally went into a fir-wood, where ran a young river, there a stream, and she would wander along its bank. Sunday was his only time, and it also happened to be the day when Edith was most at leisure. Sunday was a mistake, according to Mrs Allen, as it encouraged idleness, and she objected to seeing people waste their time, so she gave card-parties and sought to infuse a little gaiety into what she regarded as the last and dark day of the week. Edith was not wanted, so could do as she pleased until the card-players had departed, and then she would be required to read something light, which could be easily understood, and help the lady to put some clothes on for eating in. Mrs Allen was a woman who would have profited by being abandoned on a desert island for two years with a few sacks of dog-biscuit, as she might have learnt to do something during that period. As it was, if she dropped a book she called Edith to pick it up for her. She had never been taught how to do such a thing herself.

Mark went off directly after dinner and waited near the wood, feeling cold and weak, but not frightened. That stage was past. He saw Edith approaching, a book under her arm, wearing those little boots which were still rather shabby in spite of the care bestowed upon them by Eli and Oli, and he watched her enter the scented pathway and saw her pick up a fir-cone and smell it—a small thing, but it told him something, because no thoughtless girl would dream of smelling a fir-cone. She disappeared, and presently he heard her singing. The wood was lonely, and she had never met anyone there, and solitude was a joy to the girl, because she could be herself, and at home it was wiser to be false. Edith and Job Lithern had something in common, for the loneliness of the fir-wood appealed to the girl as the solitude of the moor called the man, although Edith did not want to be alone; all she desired was to get away from uncongenial society. She was singing a hymn, one of those sentimental things which cling like a bit of

goose-grass, an evening hymn. There is no sentiment in a morning hymn.

Edith was sitting beside the stream, the water of which looked golden because it was shallow, and the sun lighted the gravel in its bed. She was not reading, but looking at the violets which grew there, smiling at some thought which refused to find a translation in her life. Seeing Mark she frowned, looked at her boots, hoping he was all right, and when he hesitated she felt uncomfortable, not liking to steal another glance at him, but finding it necessary to do so that she might discover what manner of being he was.

"Lost his way, I suppose," she murmured. "He hasn't any right in here. I haven't either."

"If yew please, miss," said a quiet voice, "may I have a word wi' yew?"

This was an awkward start, for it sounded as if he was trying to force himself upon her; and Edith started, looked round, but the severity on her face softened when she saw the figure. "Certainly not," was on her tongue, but she did not speak the words, and said instead, "Do you know who I am?" with the pretty manner of one who claimed to be a queen.

"Yew'm the young lady I saw in hospital. Yew gave me a posy o' flowers."

"Oh yes. Now I remember you," she said. "You are the man who underwent an operation for your father's sake and then refused to accept a present for it. Well, I don't blame you. But it was well-meant, and you offended them."

Edith had heard the story from Mrs Allen, who had subscribed sixpence to the testimonial, and subsequently alluded to Mark as a "sullen and ungrateful devil."

"I may ha' been vulish," he said. "When volks hurt me I seem to get silly-like, and someone else talks vor me. I don't know what 'tis I ses, but it comes out straight, and it gives offence. May I ha' a word wi' yew, miss?" he asked earnestly.

Edith did not much like to give consent. It was very lonely there, someone might see them; and as it was known

that her position in Mrs Allen's household was not a lofty one, all manner of things would certainly be said; but that earnest voice was in her ears, "I ha' nobody to help me. I be all alone, and I ha' got to du what I be told. I saw yew come in here, and I followed, taking the liberty. I must find the way"; and she knew it was not Mark talking, but the someone else. So she decided to let him speak.

"Don't think I can help you," she said quickly. "I can't." It was difficult to know what to say, as she could not confess and must not delude him.

"Yew can, miss. Ever since I left hospital I've had a mind to speak to yew. There b'ain't no one else."

"Your head is aching," she said gently.

He had his hand up as if in pain and his face was white.

"'Tis the thought, the feeling yew can't du nought. I be standing alone, and 'tis all going on round me and no one heeds. When I tries to sleep I hears a voice saying: 'Tis going on now, Mark. Shame on ye to lie there and not put a stop to it.' Them what thinks feels it, and them what don't think knows nought. While I be telling here there be many a God's creature mad wi't, same as I be mad to think on't, and volks laugh at 'em and ses they'm vunny. I tells o' the drink, miss."

"Oh!" exclaimed Edith, and turned more towards him with a flush on her face, while the stream laughed below as though it would say, "I have golden water. Why don't they drink me?" and the bank of white sorrel and purple violets looked suddenly tragic, feeling they were wasted there. "Why do you say that to me, I wonder?"

"There be no one else."

"There is the whole world," she cried; "the whole of this drunken Devonshire, the most drunken place, I believe, in all the world. It is my father; he was like this, and as helpless," she said to herself, though Mark heard her. "It was my father," she went on, "who made me hate the thought. He

died in the fight against it. The spirit of evil ruling by consent he called it."

"Yew sees it tu, miss. Yew feels it?" he asked eagerly.

"I was brought up to see and feel it. If I were a man, if I could write, speak, think, I would devote my life as my father did—but it would be no use. I understand you now," she said. "It is the knowledge that it is going on, as you say, while you are thinking, and you cannot do anything. That is where the pain comes in, those headaches, the longing to die and stop thinking. I have seen my father in tears. 'You cannot do anything, Edith.'"

"Ah, miss—miss—miss, I wants to be a minister."

There was something touching in that cry among the pine-branches, made so by the repetition of that title which emphasised his position and told them both how far he was from the ease of a lazy living.

"A clergyman."

"Miss?"

"Of the church?"

"I'll du it!" he cried.

"You cannot. You would never get in."

"Not if I works?"

"They would say you must have a degree, a silk hood round your neck, a knowledge of dead languages."

"I'd sit up all night."

"No good. You must have a gentleman's education," said Edith, but her eyes were shining with excitement. "There is the chapel."

"What tells a man which way to vote. Chapel be like that watter, miss, noise, and nought to tak' hold of. 'Tis the money what governs the country, say what 'em will else, and yew can't fight the money through chapel."

"Are you strong?" she asked, clenching her small hands.

"I b'ain't strong, miss. I can't work wi' vaither, though he'm seventy. But I ha' something here," he said, touching his chest and standing up straight.

"The strong man is the one who tries to do good. If I could only help you. I know who can, who will—Mr Vivian."

Mark shook his head.

"He will help you," Edith insisted. "He is so very kind. He spoke well of you for refusing that watch, thought it was plucky of you. I have never known him refuse to help."

The young girl was deceived by Vivian. Kind he was, but that knotted character passed all understanding. Mark's action had gratified his cynicism, and given him an opportunity to laugh at the rector's discomfiture.

"I know him. He is nice to me," she said gratefully. "I'll write and ask if he will have a talk with you."

"Thank ye, miss."

"You will go if he consents?"

The chance could not be lost. If Vivian should be willing to help, the path would be made indeed, for Mark believed that a man of such influence could bring anything to pass.

"I may see him during the week. That would be better than writing," said Edith. "I will beg him to help you; he will, I am sure of it. I have heard he once took off his coat and gave it to a beggar."

When Mark got back to Love Lane he felt out of misery; the crisis was past, the fog had begun to lift, and there was a kind of light in the distance. Caleb was reading his Bible and arguing with Barseba as to the precise value of a shekel of silver. Mark went to his duties, one of which was to find the stag-turkey, whose asceticism increased day by day, and had then reached a stage which compelled the bird to withdraw altogether from the vanities of the farmyard and to make itself a cell in the field of granite, where it could brood upon the coming woe.

The next morning a letter came from Patience, the first she had written to Love Lane since her departure, which had taken place upon the first of the Frankin days, and therefore within the period of Mark's spiritual struggle. During the following week that letter gave him some food for thought, which he was

becoming capable of, more so since his talk with Edith, who in her helplessness was yet doing much for him, the great thing needful in fact: she was arousing the slumbering being into life.

That day of the journey from home to the world foolish Patience had been shown that her "dear boys" were not altogether the pretty things she took them for. When the train came into the station she caught a glimpse of military coats in a smoking compartment, and, as these were things dear to her sight, she sauntered about for a little, then joined them with an appearance of hurry and confusion. It was a fast train, and the next stop was Devonport. She sat in a corner, staring at the window, and could distinguish in the glass two fellow-passengers, very young soldiers with great heads, flat faces, and blasphemous-looking mouths. They were winking at each other, promising themselves some fun, and making signs in her direction which pleased Patience, because she thought there might be some love-making presently.

The train moved on, cleared the platform, and immediately one of the boys alluded to the girl in the corner as an unmentionable something. The other jumped across and hit him; both howled and rolled about the cushions, and Patience heard a few expressions which were new to her.

"I think yew gentlemen might behave before a lady," she said crossly.

"Do you hear, mate? She's a lady," shouted the one with the ugliest mouth.

"Blest if we'd ha' known it if she hadn't told us," howled the other; and both collapsed upon the cushions, laughing and swearing, spitting on the floor and at each other with vast good-humour, until one stretched himself out leering and said, "Give us a good 'ugging, love." Then he put his head upon her lap and pretended to snore.

"Get off, will ye?" cried Patience, becoming conscious of something else, a stench of liquor, every time the young monster breathed.

"Tickle us, love," he howled.

"Just you leave my gal alone, old cock," shouted the other, lurching against the window, then falling upon the seat opposite Patience and beginning to poke at her with his cane.

"Leave off, will ye? Yew be hurting me," she said, beginning to whimper.

The one opposite lost his balance and fell over her; then they pulled her down upon the seat, sat upon her, and sang "Rule Britannia," while Patience shrieked and struggled, for they were really hurting her, though she almost deserved it for her folly. She shook them off somehow; but they settled on each side of her, each with an arm round her waist, smacking great lewd kisses over her face, and making foul suggestions until she began to cry.

"What you done to the lady?" shouted one.

"Offered her my 'eart and fortunes," hiccuped the other.

"Don't ye cry, sweet love," leered the ugliest mouth; and the owner of it smacked her face with his hot dirty hand.

This was a new game which pleased them mightily. Both smacked her, pulled her hat off, pinched her arms; when she tried to reach from the window and scream for help they dragged her back, and when she begged for mercy they only cursed.

"Cry baby!" howled the one; and the other took up the cry, "Cry baby, that's what you be."

All the way to Devonport they tormented the wretched girl, though they taught her no wisdom, and screamed like parrots, "Cry baby, that's what you be. Well there, I'd be ashamed of being such a little cry baby"; and before the train stopped they fell upon the platform on hands and knees, then picked themselves up and ran, making as much noise as if they had conquered the world.

Mark stood in the court, a dung-fork leaning against his shoulder, little pigs squealing and jumping around, as he opened the envelope with that thrill which comes to those who rarely receive a letter. The paper was pink and dainty,

stamped with coloured pansies for remembrance, making a strange contrast to the ugly scrawl upon it. The paper was cheap, however, like the education which had made use of it, and the affection which it breathed to excess. Mark read :—

"My own darling Sweetheart.—Ever so many thanks for your sweet letter. I was so delighted to get it dear. You are a dear to write me such a lovely letter I really did not expect to hear from you so soon. We are having quite nice weather again now aren't we dear I do hope it will continue for a little while. I have just come in from chapel my thoughts were with you the whole time dearest I wondered where you were and what you were doing. I don't know any more news that I can write to you dear except that I hope you will get on alright and not kill yourself with the work. Often when I am alone I long to see you I am sure I love you and think of you more now than ever I have done before. Won't it be heavenly when I can throw my arms around you and love you again I am longing for our next meeting to cling together and love each other don't ever think I don't care so much for you darling for I love you more every day I want to be with you so much sometimes. I always think of you when I get my blouse fastened up and wish it was you. Now dearest I think I have told you quite a lot so must now close darling with all my love to you from your own little Patience. I hope you had a nice time in Exeter. When I read your letter I really could not help laughing though I felt sorry for you I would have loved to have seen you in the hospital with the bit of skin cut off. Kisses to Tibby. He is a Pet. Excuse this letter dearie."

Certainly it required excusing. Mark felt as much, now that his mind had been touched by the sympathy of Edith, compared to which this torrent of dear and darling was a shower of ice. The girl who had written that letter told him in the lane above she would not marry him, she had no love for him, and wanted some one livelier. Now she appeared to be casting her affections at him. It was not so really. Patience

felt she ought to write some reply to his grave statements, and the only words she could find were those which concerned what it pleased her to call love. Her feelings were conveyed by the postscript, which was the letter so far as Mark was concerned. The rest had been copied. Patience had not been wasting time, she was getting the boys into her net; and she had already written two letters exactly similar, each commencing with "My own darling Sweetheart." She was too careless to notice that remark about the blouse, which certainly did not concern Mark, though it set him thinking; and too indifferent to understand that, in spite of her protestation of love, which, after all, meant nothing, she sent her kisses to Tibby the lamb only.

The turkey approached Mark, spreading itself out and puffing austerely. It desired him to open the gate so that it might escape into the wilderness, get away from the hens and their silly ways which made him bilious. His cold eyes stared at that sheet of pink paper, and he appeared to shake with anger.

"I ha' been wi' the maid all her life," said Mark. "A pretty little thing, but her never could look straight."

He was advancing, he was seeing things; a month back he might have believed Patience really loved him, but now he doubted. The mind had been stirred. Men of the fields who are not touched by any light, Mark's equals, rarely ask themselves whether they love a girl; they choose one and marry her, and do not go after others, because they have not the time and cannot afford it. But Mark asked himself the question. He did not love Patience, at least he felt he might get along very well without her, but he could not let her go. He had gone about with her, had won her trust, and it was his duty to help her on, keep her respectable, make her look straight. With the best intentions in the world he might have been a danger to Patience, for even goodness leads a maid astray if she is brought up with it and then goes out into the world, thinking to find it there, with a little fun added,

without having the sense to know that the little fun may mean her ruin.

"I ha'heard from Patty," said Mark to the always busy Barseba.

"How du she fancy her situation?"

"Her ses nought of it."

"Don't her tell ye what the work be?" While old Caleb broke in, "How much money be her getting?"

"Her don't tell," said Mark, answering them both.

"What du her tell then?" asked Barseba.

"I reckon 'tis mostly love," Mark answered.

"Aw, yew young men and maids. All you thinks of be kisses and the like. When yew marries yew wonders what 'tis yew wur so mazed on. Well, Patty will be all right if her don't get larning tu much o' that there multiplication table. 'Tis that what makes 'em dafty"; and Barseba whetted a knife on her palm, then marched off to the poultry-house to slaughter a few innocents.

It was the last of the Frankin days, and the devil, being a gentleman of honour where clients were concerned, had not failed to keep the contract. He had sent the frost, but, being also Jesuitical, he had contrived to spare the apple-blossom. It had been a sharp frost, he would have explained, but somehow the orchards had been able to withstand it. Towards evening a figure came across the fields, a big, stooping man, wearing dark baggy clothes and a shapeless felt hat, a pair of eye-glasses swinging in front of him, and dogs jumping about him. He walked with strange motions of his arms, and sometimes he stopped to laugh.

"Remarkable man, Hosken," he murmured. "Objects to having the grass cut in the churchyard. Says it might disturb the sleepers. Proposes sheep to eat it off. When I remind him of the mess they make he holds up his hands and says, 'Dear me, how shocking!' Poor thing."

He reached the gate of the court, pulled it open, and Barseba, who was washing potatoes at the pump, started and muttered, "'Tis Squire Vivian."

"Good-evening, Mrs Starke. Nice old-fashioned place you live in," said the lord of the district, who was, in a manner, the descendant of Squire Fursdon, not resembling him in violence, but with the same strong spirit which made people dance to the tune that he fiddled.

"Aw, and us be old-fashioned volk, I tell ye," said Barseba. "Please to step inside, sir. I wish yew wur our landlord 'stead of a lot of old mazeheads, sir; then us might get the place kept a bit vitty like."

The squire's goodness in matters of restoration was well known. Every cottage upon his property was in sound condition, and the tenants had only to make a complaint when things went wrong. They called him the kindest man that had ever lived.

"Mark Yeo," said Vivian, holding a note-book to those keen eyes which pretended to be short-sighted. "You have a young man of that name working for you. I wish to see him. He may amuse me."

"I hopes yew b'ain't agwaine to tak' Mark away. He'm a gude lad," said Barseba.

"Rather too good, I fear. A sort of Hogarth's excellent apprentice, whom personally I should have been sorry to trust with the cash. I am rather frightened when I find virtue spread too thickly."

He was speaking to the pump, as Barseba had gone for Mark, and he stood there swinging his eye-glasses until the young man appeared. "Like David from the sheep-fold," muttered Vivian. "Let us see if he is the Lord's anointed or not. Well, Mark," he said, "I have a letter about you from —let me see, who is it from? Mrs Allen, I think. Mrs Allen writes to me——"

"Miss Gribbin, sir," interrupted Mark.

"Ah yes, that little girl—rather too thin, but she will grow out of it and get pretty. Rather a nice little girl. Let me see. You want to have a conflagration on the Thames, make a few new laws, pull the constitution about a bit. I like a definite

programme. You had better walk back with me, and we can talk on the way. You don't mind walking with me, I hope? I understand I am a gentleman."

Mark flushed a little and said nothing. It was not easy for a plain tongue to answer that cynical talk. He had known Squire Vivian would be hard to tackle, but all power was in his hands, and when a man is obscure he must take knocks.

It was a narrow pathway across the fields. Vivian walked along it, while Mark in the wet grass kept a yard of politeness between the great man and himself.

"What is it—a vocation? What they describe as a call from above, an angelic visitation to the farmyard? I don't think I should like angels. If they settled among us for any time we should probably find them very middle-class people. Have they been coming to see you?" said Vivian, stopping to laugh in his amiable way.

The thing inside stirred then, and Mark found himself speaking, slowly, with less dialect than usual, earnestly as ever, using words which astonished the squire and made him mutter, "Where does he get it from?" It was easy to speak after all when the need came.

"The boys do drink too much," said Vivian indulgently. "But then they have nothing else to do. I am always lenient when I see the poor things rolling about the road. They have few pleasures, and this is possibly their greatest. I always take care not to drive over them. There are too many public-houses," he went on in the same careless way. "We ought to take away a licence or two, but that means opposition, compensation, a lot of bother and ill-feeling. Some of them belong to the rector. He would go to law over it. A lot of expense, and the whole village would celebrate the verdict, whichever way it went, by getting drunk."

"Tak' away all or none, sir," said Mark firmly.

"I do not argue," came the cold reply, putting Mark in his place. "I like Miss Gribbin," the squire went on, as if speaking to himself. "A nice girl. It was very good of her

to write; very kind. I must go over there. Is that all you wanted to say, Mark? I will think over it, and let you know what we propose doing about the licences. In the meantime you might amuse yourself by distributing a few leaflets. I understand there are Temperance Societies who supply such things."

"Didn't the young lady tell yew, sir? I wants to be made a minister."

There was a short silence. Vivian walked on, his long arms swinging, and presently he said, "Don't marry, Mark. That's always the advice I give to young men, though none of them take it. When a man marries he becomes a kind of bog-weed. I would rather have a man drunk than a breeder of drunkards; but the world, the flesh and the devil are against me there. The advice I give you is to steer clear of matrimony. Now, I suppose you will go to church with some wench next month—probably because you have to."

This was not in the least the advice that Mark was seeking, but he could only say, "I b'ain't that sort, sir."

"I should also advise you not to be original," said the paradoxical squire, smiling lazily at Mark's troubled face. "It makes a man's liver out of order and sets him quarrelling with everyone he meets. You may come in," he said, as Mark hesitated at the garden gate. "You are quite interesting. That magnolia is a heavenly thing. This is bergamot—I can't think why more people don't grow it. I should advise you to study plants and shrubs, Mark. You will get far more satisfaction out of them than from human beings."

"Sir, will ye please answer me?" cried Mark.

"I will think over it. Too many licences. Yes, I agree with you. We must close the Red Lion. Really, I don't see any necessity for the Red Lion."

They had reached a grass-plot surrounded by great rhododendrons, and behind these were firs. It was silent there, and almost dark, because the trees and shrubs kept the light out. Vivian was half-way across, making for the path opposite, when

suddenly a figure came before him, a figure with a white face apparently blind; and then a fierce strong voice, which he did not remember to have heard before, "I must have your answer, Squire Vivian. I want to be an ordained minister of the church. Will you help me? I must have a plain yes or no from you here."

Vivian hesitated, swung his glasses, smiled. The man seemed a little excited and getting rude; but he would give way presently, as most men did when he opposed them.

"I believe you are standing in my way," he said, making a step forward.

Mark did not flinch. He saw nothing but a cloudy thing upon the black shrubs beckoning him to remain. He was fighting Squire Vivian, mind against mind, fighting not only the richest and greatest gentleman of the district, but an iron will.

"I must really request you not to be a damned fool," said Vivian smoothly. That was his usual remark when crossed, and he had never known it to fail. He used it to any one, regardless of sex or position, and it had always fallen with a crushing effect until then. Mark did not give way. There was something on his face which made Vivian uncomfortable, "like a man on the rack," as he expressed it; and the squire turned sharply with a shiver, having that nervous feeling of some presence behind him, but there was nothing except the thick bushes and on the other side that ghastly blind face, dead-looking and yet full of fighting.

"What's wrong with you, Mark?"

"There be something burning like fire in me, sir," came the dazed answer.

"What do you want?"

"Yew know, sir. Be I to ask a hundred times?" cried the blind face passionately.

"I am not a spiritual father," said Vivian, laughing feebly. "Why don't you take your trouble to Mr Hosken?"

'He wouldn't hearken to me, sir."

"All the more reason why I should not. I must not interfere with his business."

"Will yew help me, squire?"

"My good fellow, I cannot do anything for you. You are an uneducated man, a labourer, and the son of one. You have no business with a vocation. I should advise you strongly to go back to the farmyard."

"Yew must help me, squire."

Vivian gave way completely. He wanted his dinner, he told himself; the ground was damp, and he was feeling chilled; but he had stood in damp cold places before and jeered the arguments of other men away. The truth, as it appeared to him, was that a labourer could hardly be worth his opposition.

"Well, you must write to the bishop. That is the only way. Put your case before him, say you have a vocation, and feel compelled to offer yourself for the ministry."

"I may say yew advised me? Yew be willing to stand vor my character?" asked, or rather demanded, the white face.

"I don't know anything against your character. I can say I have never seen you the worse for liquor," said Vivian, falling back on his usual weapon of cynicism.

"Yes or no, sir?"

"Yes, I suppose."

Before he had finished speaking Mark seemed to depart like a ghost, and there was no more sound except a rustling in the bushes; and the next day an ill-worded, badly-spelt letter went off to the bishop's palace.

There was no reply, so Mark wrote again, enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope; and the reply came—

"Sir,—The Bishop requests me to say he has given very earnest thought to your application, and regrets that your lack of education and want of a degree render you in his opinion unsuitable as a candidate for Holy Orders. He considers, however, you may be of great value to the Church in this present time by attacking many of the evils which assail her in the capacity of lay-worker."

It was not the answer Mark had looked for. He expected at least some sympathy, if no encouragement, so he wrote again, an earnest letter full of pathetic mis-spellings begging to be told what such a one as he could do in a lay capacity. Again there was no answer, and Mark had not the spirit to write again. It was evident he could not break the ecclesiastical ring. No outsiders were required; only a gentleman need apply; for him there was the chapel, and the church was for his betters, for the cynical squire and the idle croquet-player, who were satisfied with the evils which Mark was recommended to assail. You shall not join us, was the tone of that letter, but you may do our dirty work, which, truth to tell, we have not the courage to do ourselves.

Mark went out upon the moor, up the steep cart-way between the plats where stone and iron were making music. Bellowing Job Lithern was making music, so was Old Will, who had hurried back to the fight before his wounds were healed. But Mark was making no sound. Granite was there, but he did not strike and cleave; his jumper, tears, feathers, and hammer were idle, and yet the field was before him, waiting to be cleared, taken in, and cultivated, that field which no man has ever cleared nor ever will.

Mark came out upon the height, and as the wind met him, something was there, keeping in front like a bird flying from one rock to another; he could not see it, but knew what it was, and yet did not know. It was the sign, and he wrestled with it there until it overcame him and said, "Your name shall be no longer farm-labourer, but strong-heart, and the words which I shall put into your mouth, that shall you speak." It was his own mind, the thing inside that was speaking; but he thought it was the misty being that lived among the rocks, making the evening voices and the evening music which Old Will so often listened to with the wind and rain.

His father was also wrestling with a giant, lying over it, anointing it with his sweat, struggling to make it move. His white whiskers mingled with the lichen, his teeth sometimes

grated upon the stone, the spittle of his mouth ran down upon it. The sight was terrible in a way. It was a kind of madness, this battle with an elementary force, this heaving of primæval rocks for very little purpose beyond the satisfaction of beating them. Let them alone and the raindrops would wear them out in time, the storm, the lightning, frost, wind, and hail, would be jumper, tears, and hammer of destruction. Already they had worn them down, made them round and smooth; but it had required the half of eternity, and Will could not wait for the other half, being an old man who would soon be wanted by a hole in the yard. There was no time to waste; he could not go until the granite had been broken up and built into a wall, so he struggled on, and the stone resisted like a giant which had lost its limbs but retained its strength.

"Vaither, I be going away," said Mark.

Will looked up with his one eye, then bowed himself again and made his arms like steel bands upon each side of the black stone, until something gave, but not the man. The rock came out of its hole, rolled over, carrying Old Will with it, and they fought together, one trying to escape down the steep slope, the other to prevent it going, and the victory went to the weak, and the sullen movements ceased.

"I'll tear mun abroad. Where be thikky hammer?" panted Old Will exultantly.

"I be going away, vaither," said Mark.

"Where be going, my dear?"

Mark pointed along the great white road.

"How fur along?"

"Till I learns," said Mark.

Neither understood what was meant; but both of them felt it had something to do with the voice which came out of the rocks when the day was far spent.

Will was listening, not to his son, but looking down with a hand behind his ear.

"'Tis gude," he said at last.

"What be listening to, vaither?"

"The sound o' Rattlebrook watter. Up beyond where squire's old highstoane stands he comes down along. He ha' told to I vor sixty year."

"Vor weather," said Mark.

"'Tis gude," the old man repeated. "I'll clear the plats avore I dies."

"I'll come to see yew and Annie avore I goes," Mark answered.

Another week passed. Heavy rain had fallen warmly and brushed the apple-blossom from all the orchards. Nature advanced in a hurry to get the fruit formed. Mark had become more settled in his mind, perceiving that he was alone in the world, that everyone is alone, that help is generally hindrance, that duty is made, not sent. Like his old father, he felt there was no time to waste. The storms would accomplish the work, but while the storm was blowing up millions of men and women would pass through the battle, the agony, of all human nature, through darkness and thunderings, with poor, weak faces, flying, now from the good cause, now from the bad; and the cry that all was lost, the alarm and the flight, would occupy the other half of eternity with trepidations.

The rector was rolling his croquet lawn, removing the worm-casts.

Mark entered the Red Lion. It was evening, and the bar-room was full of miners, labourers, and loafers: men who worked under compulsion, some well, others badly, and those who refused to work at any price. The bar-room supplied that which made them all kin. All belonged to the same great family there, good fellows all. It was hot, as the blinds were down; the room was grey with strong smoke and sour with the smell of beer. Several of the men were drunk.

Mark went up, stood beside the counter, leaning against it, looking down the room. He wanted to speak, but could not find the words. Here were men whom he had grown up with and known all his life, and others as old as his

father, rough, big fellows, very much his superiors in physical strength. It would have been less hard to speak had they been strangers.

"'Tis most unusual to see Mark Yeo in here," was the general comment.

"What's it to be?" asked the landlord briskly. "As yew'm such a stranger, Mark, I don't mind standing a pint."

"Thank ye," said Mark. "I'll tak' it, landlord."

The brimming glass was handed over, and Mark held it out. "Good-health," he said, then he poured it down upon the floor.

"I'll tell ye why I done that," he said, when the shout of laughter had subsided, for the men supposed he had come there to amuse them. "I ha' come down along the village, and there b'ain't a sound in the cottages, 'cept here and there some little children crying, but in every one o' these beer-houses there be noise enough. I say the proper place vor men be to their homes."

"Proper place vor yew be the asylum, I reckon," cried the angry landlord.

"Let 'en talk," went up the voices. "He'm going in vor the ministry. 'Tis gude practice vor mun."

"I ses what I thinks," Mark went on. "'Tis a cruel pity to see volks what earns gude wages throwing their money away on this sour trade. B'ain't there better things to buy, volks? B'ain't there clothes vor the children and vurniture vor the homes? B'ain't it better to put a bit away vor holiday or bad times? I know how 'tis. Yew craves to meet together and tell your stories about one thing and t'other—but it b'ain't vair on the women-volk, it b'ain't vair on the children. If yew goes along home sober it b'ain't vair, vor yew ha' robbed them. What du a man want wi' a home or women and children if he don't bide wi' 'em? Might as well bide here, I reckon, and sleep wi' the beasts. 'Tis a cruel hard time vor the women, washing, cleaning, and sewing all the day, trying to mak' a bit of a home, and having it torn abroad by the master when he comes home drunk. If there wur any gude in it I would

say nought, but there b'ain't no gude. A man gets thirsty, and if he craves beer, let 'en come and have a pint, if he can get out when he ha' drunk it; and if he can't get out, and bides vor another pint, it b'ain't because he'm thirsty, and I ses 'tis better vor that man if he don't drink beer at all."

A big miner, half sprawling across the table, tried to straighen himself, rolled over to Mark, and stammered, "What wur yew saying about my woman and children? Yew mind what yew ses, my son."

Mark edged away from him, and went on, having found his tongue at last, "I b'ain't saying a word agin landlord. He ha' got his living to mak', and the law allows it; but what I ses is, if volks can't look after themselves 'tis the duty of the law to du it vor 'em. The time will come when drinking-houses will be abolished, not one or two, vor that b'ain't no gude, but the whole lot of 'em, and what I wants is to hasten that time. When yew clears vern 'tis no gude getting a bit o' the root out. If yew don't get all the root he grows agin. Clear 'em all out, I ses, like us clears the plats up on Dartmoor, send any man to prison who makes beer or cider——"

"Go and tell to squire and parson," broke in the landlord. "Tell 'em yew ha' come to tak' their brandy and wine away. Us'll be glad to hear what 'em ses to ye."

"They'll ha' to give it up some day," said Mark. "Us don't want one law vor they and another vor we——"

"Yew'm insulting my woman and children," shouted the drunken miner, trying to spit on his hands, but missing his aim, then lurching towards Mark.

"That's it. Put 'en out," said the landlord.

"I insulted no man's wife and children," said Mark.

"If yew ses another word agin my woman I'll half murder ye," shouted the miner.

"Look at 'en!" said Mark foolishly. "I know what his woman be doing—sewing and looking up to the old grandvaither, and wondering mebbe what her wur born vor. Yew'm a drunkard!" he cried loudly. "All yew volks be drunkards;

and when a man, be he poor man or rich man, get so low as to crave vor a pint o' beer or a bottle o' wine, I reckon 'tis best vor him to die. He'm no gude to his master, and no gude to the world, and 'tis a strange thing if he be much gude to his God."

"Don't yew get telling any blasphemy in here," shouted the landlord, putting out his arms and pushing Mark from the sloppy counter; and the same moment the miner lurched forward and knocked him down upon the beer which he had spilt, stammering wildly, "I'll larn 'en to insult my woman."

The room became a hive of hubbub, excitement, and oaths, and the drunkards began to fight their shadows. Mark staggered outside with a bruised and burning head, got away from the hot light into the soft and friendly darkness; and up at Fursdon Head he bathed his face in the water that descended from the moor, and early next morning he departed and disappeared, with a bundle on his shoulder, along the big wide road.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT THE BRIDGE

FOUR years had gone. Four times a carpet of blue had been woven in Teign woods; and out of the mist, swept down from the cap of Prestonbury, came the immortals, creatures of the true märchen, which are as eternal as the secrets of the earth. An old man and his cart staggering along the tributaries of the road, Old Coles, with immortal fish and rags and a basket of reincarnated oranges. Four years were only four shovelsfull of earth, not enough to bury him, and they had not gone by without happenings. A fresh and stronger pony dragged the cart, each wheel of which described a straggling orbit, and the business had been enlarged, bananas had been added to the stock-in-trade, while the difficulty of preventing the oranges from rolling into the fish-barrel had been complicated by the problem of preventing the bananas from becoming intermingled with the rags.

Drawing his cart into the shade Old Coles rested, not daring to sleep lest children should come around and steal. On the other side of the wall were the tombstones of Drewsteignton, many of them marked with a very low figure, some with a month or two; inexpensive lives these, seeds which had germinated and then been cut down by the frost. It was unfair, thought the old man, that there should be so many shirkers, that he should have to work all through the day while the majority refused and went to bed early.

Old Coles was not the sole immortal, the only creature of folk-lore in that place. He was the rhapsodist, singing an old epic of rags and bones as he passed through. Teign woods

were haunted, and here also was a tale that never died. A being was there impossible to classify, a man-like thing which lived among the rocks and could be seen in the grass-clearings and along the steep banks beside the abandoned huts of the oak-rhinders, talking to itself, drawing pictures. Sometimes it came up into the village and took the form of a sailor-man; and then it was the old wives found their water-crocks filled and their kindling broken ready for use at their doors. A good spirit was abroad, practising virture for its own reward, and every night that blue-tinted gorge of the Teign was filled with whistling, tinged with a note of sadness, like the pipe of a lonely blackbird between the lights.

The sailor was not the only haunting spirit of the woods. Under a projecting cliff of granite, in danger of falling fragments, appeared the brown bell of a tent, and outside at the edge of the river were some of those wonders of folding furniture which would have been so useful to early cave-dwellers. There was no voice, no whistling; it was very quiet except for the rattling of the water and the squawk of the jays; some one was camping there alone, trying to get back to Nature, to understand the fascination of sweet air and water, with a mountain on one side and steep woods upon the other; also studying, for there were books upon a little table, which folded up prettily every time the wind struck it, two of the dullest books ever devised by the wit of man—Dibdin's *Bibliomania* and the Countess of Warwick's *Arcadia*. So the camper-out was not an ordinary individual—though he was the son of a pork butcher.

Here were the ideals of romance: the weary old man resting in his cart, the whistling creature in the gorge, the philosopher in his tent, and around them the hills, not frowning but gentle, not hard but covered with brown earth and woods, green piled upon green for a thousand feet, though all was blue beneath; for it was the fifth bluebell time by the Teign, and the blossoms gave new colour to the atmosphere, dyed the river, and made a purple mist of sunshine.

Each day the pork butcher's son and the sailor ascended to the village, for even immortals must eat, and the kind of man who reads dull books may also be supposed to receive dull letters, while the sailor had his little duties to perform in aid of the poor and needy. While Old Coles sat in the shade both were approaching, but from opposite directions, for the book-reader came along the road at the foot of Prestonbury, while the whistler climbed up the ghost of a pathway from the logan stone between Hunt's Tor and Sharpitor, and so far they had not come face to face, though the one had often heard the other whistling in the woods. Both would have to reach Old Coles, and the pork butcher's son was the first by half an hour.

He was a clergyman, slender and pale, quite young, and there was no doubt about the weakness. The heart was there, and with it the brain; but the mind had a crack in it, a fault such as occurs in granite, spoiling the block for the merchant. It would crumble at the blow of the chisel, at opposition; it could not stand against the hammer. It was a mind that desired to please its enemies, and did not know how to fight them. He had an old man's trick of walking with his hands clasped behind his back, and the thinker's way of peering into the dust. That was his fault; he looked down instead of up; and the sailor who was climbing by Sharpitor always looked up and beyond, so that he stumbled sometimes because he never looked down to see where he placed his feet. There was a middle course for each, only they could not find it. Had each set out for a walk alone, without any particular object, the sailor would have climbed a mountain while the clergyman would have descended into the gorge. That was the difference between them; the one chose the difficult way, the other the easy one.

The clergyman's father was not a pork prince, nor yet a potentate of sausages; but a thrifty tradesman in a small market-town who, by dint of saving pennies, had made guineas, had sent his only son to a public school, then to the university, in the simple hope of sitting in church one day and hearing

Gerard preach. If sausages could make a man a bishop, sausages should; so he worked on putting away more of those pound-producing pennies, not for himself but to smooth his son's pathway to the episcopacy—a kind, simple, old man, with his white apron and carpet-slippers, shirt-sleeves rolled above his elbows, and his hands covered with grease, bending over crocks of lard, slabs of white or streaky meat, and dishes laden with weird products imported to his marble slab from the internal economy of the pig. "Don't say anything about the old fellow and the shop," he told his son, in the spirit of honest deceit which breaks no commandment. "If I ever see you walking past with a bishop or a dean I shan't take any notice of you, beyond touching my forehead. I shall be proud, and that's all I want. I shall be proud of my boy." The old man felt that swine's flesh and bishop's gaiters would not go together, but the son knew that his father's kindness was of more value than many bishops.

The greatest benefit that can be conferred upon any boy is a public school and university training, if there is anything in him which can respond, and if there is nothing he may as well be knocked on the head. There is in that training all the arts of the lapidary polishing the unshapen stone, all the cunning of the gardener converting the wayside weed into a garden flower, all the skill of a sculptor cutting immortality out of marble. Ships and swords have won battles which are as nothing compared with the triumphs achieved along the pathways of the academy. The manner of the training makes a gentleman. Gerard was somewhat rough when he went in, and the process of being born again was a little painful. He came out accomplished, not a scholar, but knowing something about everything except science, which is for few. He had a good voice and knew how to use it, and he was an excellent musician. Every month he wrote home, and the old pork-butcher's eyes would gleam as they read the learned English. It was the work of the sausages, so the honest tradesman hurried off to make some more, the best of their kind, and

never neglected when replying to enclose a cheque, which was not required but could not be returned. The money would be wanted towards maintaining the son's household. Gerard would be requiring a retinue now.

Old Coles was wondering what object the Creator could have had when He invented flies—they were buzzing about him like a lot of George Vids declaring he owed them blood—when he saw Gerard Spiller, or rather heard him calling at the side of the cart and telling him it was time to wake and do business.

"Aw, 'tis the gentleman wi' the shirts," he cried.

Old Coles had attended the curate professionally, and recently had been given a parcel of discarded garments consisting principally of shirts, therefore Spiller had become fixed in his worn-out mind as a shirt-provider. There had been mystic raiment in that parcel which passed the old fellow's comprehension, a suit of clothes apparently, and designed for use in warm weather, though shamefully inadequate for travelling purposes. Old Coles felt he could not wear such things about the villages, and he was anxious to receive instructions concerning them.

"They shirts be proper, sir," he said; "but them clothes b'ain't vitty. They'm tu open like, and the wind blows through 'em cruel."

"What clothes? I don't remember giving you any."

"Them flappy ones what yew ties around wi' bits o' cord. Us wants hot weather vor they surely, sir, and they'm tored where 'em shouldn't be tored," he said bashfully.

Gerard laughed merrily and tried to explain matters. "You put them on when you go to bed."

Wreford had been young and now was old, but he had never heard of such a strange proceeding.

"What be the shirts vor then?" he asked.

"To wear in the day-time."

"Tak' 'em off when yew goes to bed?" asked Old Coles in horror. "Tak' off one thing and put on another. What be the gude, sir?"

"Well, it is considered healthy."

"I be an old man," said Wreford as usual. "I ha' kept healthy; but I reckon if I'd been in the habit o' taking off a warm shirt and putting on a cold suit o' clothes every night I'd be along o' they volks," he said, nodding in the direction of the tombs. "What I ha' worked in I sleeps in."

"We have different habits you see," said Gerard.

"I knows now why yew gentry don't mak' old bones. Yew'm main cruel fond o' cold watter, and yew catches rheumatics and early death every time yew goes to bed," said Old Coles. "Yew'm in such a fluster to be healthy that yew goes and kills yourselves," he added severely.

"We like to be comfortable while we do live," Gerard reminded him.

"I fancy it be more comfortable dead," said Old Coles. "I wur envying o' they volk in there," he went on, nodding again to the tombs. "The flies b'ain't teasing they, and when 'tis rough weather 'em laughs."

This was rather a quaint view; but Old Coles had got into the way of regarding the tenants of the churchyard as a lot of lazy creatures lying snugly in their beds, conscious somehow that less fortunate beings were working, being cheated, and exposed to the sudden changes of the most treacherous weather in the world.

"How is business?" asked Gerard, flapping a cloud of flies from the pony's head with a frond of bracken.

"Fruit be gude and so be rags, but fish wun't bide. 'Tis hot vor 'em."

There was indeed a smell about the cart which suggested that the market report concerning fish was accurate.

"I must have some bananas," said Gerard.

Old Coles climbed down from the cart and commenced to rummage, while Gerard told him, "You should keep the fish away from the rags."

"I du try, sir, but 'em flaps together like," explained Old Coles. "I gets forgetful o' the barrels, and mebbe I drops a

fish in wi' the rags and an orange in wi' the fish, an' then 'em has to be took out again. Things get mixed up cruel, but I be a very old man, sir."

"The bananas are covered with coal dust. You should sweep the cart out."

"Yew ets the insides o' mun, not the skins, sir," explained Old Coles eagerly. "They'm seven vor sixpence, sir."

Gerard approached to select the cleanest, and while so doing Old Coles commenced a strange performance. Staggering up to the curate, he went through what he flattered himself was a sleight of hand feat with his shivering and clumsy fingers, pulling about Gerard's clothing as if he was trying to pick his pockets, pushing him this way and that, holding on to him for support, and believing all the time that he was acting in secret and Gerard would be very much surprised when he got back to his tent to find a small present in his pocket. Old Coles was fond of bestowing gifts in this unobtrusive manner upon any one who did not try to cheat him; and just then he was striving his utmost to slip into the curate's pocket a slimy fish which had been separated somewhat too long from the romance of blue water. He was smearing Gerard's coat with odorous scales and unpleasantness from the barrel.

"What are you doing, Wreford?" asked the victim at length.

"I be admiring o' they tombstones, sir," said the cunning old fellow; then he chuckled and said to himself: "He don't know what I wur up to, but he'll be proper mazed when he goes to pull out his handkerchief"; thinking he had surely pocketed that fish, when it was lying upon the ground at the mercy of the flies.

Old Coles could neither count nor reckon when in the presence of a customer. Alone he managed to take stock by placing fish or bananas upon the grass in batches of five, then adding them up; but he was unable to accomplish this feat when confronted by a ready reckoner who held a brief against him. So he was easily cheated. He counted up to five with wonderful precision; but, after that, figures merged into higher

mathemetics and would not arrange themselves into a proper trade sequence.

"Don't ye tak' tu many, sir," he pleaded wistfully.

"Do you suppose I mean to cheat you?"

"Volks don't call it cheating. 'Tis getting value vor their money," explained Old Coles, and proceeded to count the bananas, one to five, not inclusive, because seven worked its way in after four, then six, and after that was a kind of deluge, for the sun was hot upon his head, and the flies worried him.

"There be sixpenn'orth, sir," he said at last, trying to hand them all over, and dropping them about the road.

"You have given me nine," said Gerard. "Here is also one small fish which has been trodden on."

"Be he dead, sir?" asked Old Coles, with much interest.

"It is more than dead. Leave it," said Gerard hastily, for the old man was threatening to go through the sleight-of-hand performance again. "Take back these two bananas, and change me a shilling."

Poor Old Coles looked distressed. He was so old, and this money-changing was an awful business. He worried five pennies out of his clothing; then, stricken with anxiety lest he should be cheating his patron, he became still more confused, handed over two other coppers, and was full of unnecessary gratitude when one was returned. Then Gerard went on to the post-office, while Old Coles recovered the battered fish and dropped it into the rag-barrel. He could not afford to throw anything away.

No more beautiful lane exists than that which curves out of Drewsteignton and winds towards the big road. As the old man and his cart went along, they brushed the white flowers aside, the common weeds of the hedgerow which were worth nothing because Nature grew them; but on the side of the lane was something stern, the smallest of houses and yet colossal, for three stones went to the making of it, and its name was the Spinsters' Rock. Three spinners built it long ago as they went to their work in the morning; so said tradition, but

did not add the names of those three mighty women who used as materials for their spinning the birth, life, and death of men. It was a temple of the Fates, and a man came out of it, not a sacrificing priest, nor a victim escaping, but a sailor with a red scar on his face and a simple little portfolio beneath his arm.

"I ha' seed yew avore," said Old Coles, when the sailor come out upon the lane and stopped him.

"Hundreds of times. I have ridden in that cart all the way from Fursdon to Exeter. How are the folks at home?"

It seemed to Old Coles that the sailor had an imperious way of speaking. The face he could remember, but not the voice, nor yet the manner. It was not a particularly friendly face either; there was no smile upon it, but sternness and a trace of ill-temper, as if it expected nothing but opposition and was holding itself ready for attack.

"How is my old father at Freezabeer? Has he cleared the plats yet?"

"Yew'm Mark Yeo," cried Old Coles.

"That's my name."

"Yew'm a sailor lad?"

"I had to see the world. I wanted to learn, and the only book which teaches is the map. I have come back to the old country. It's the most beautiful one I have seen, and the ugliest. There's a thick mist over it."

"Not to-day there b'aint," said Old Coles. "It be vull o' Dartmoor mist most times, but it be proper when us gets the sun. Yew ha' been fighting in them foreign countries," he went on admiringly. "'Twur fortunate yew didn't get your head cut off. Wur it them savages yew fought?"

"Savages," Mark said. "Yes, if you like. Devonshire men on the other side of the world, with knives in their hands and the devil inside them. My scars are nothing to boast of. I won them in a tavern, like many an old soldier."

Old Coles supposed Mark had taken to drink and was sorry, because the Yeos had always been steady, but he could not

understand the sailor who had changed so completely and talked so well. That the wound might have been caused by a sober man opposing drunkards did not enter into his comprehension.

"What wur yew doing in the Spinsters' Rock?" he asked.

"I often go there. I was thinking of you," said Mark.

"There b'ain't many who does that," replied the old man. "The little maiden don't think o' me, vor her can't, and there b'ain't no one else. Mebbe the pony thinks o' me when his belly be empty," he added hopefully.

"Look here," said Mark. He placed his portfolio upon the end of the cart, opened it, then turned and asked sharply, "Is Miss Gribbin still here?"

"Who?" said Old Coles.

"The young lady who lives with Mrs Allen."

"Aw, her be here. Her be friends like wi' the curate. Parson be feeble got," he explained. "The work be tu much vor mun, so he got a curate, and now he does nought. I wish I wur a parson," Old Coles went on with a queer laugh. "I'd get a curate and then I'd du nought."

Mark smiled at that, almost cynically, and at the same moment a breeze came along the lane, stirring what was inside the portfolio, and bearing to the dust a sheet of parchment to which was affixed a large seal of wafer and tissue-paper. Mark regained it hurriedly, while Old Coles, obeying his instructions, looked into the portfolio and expressed amazement.

"Here be trouts," he said. "Here be Fingle Bridge."

"Here are men charcoal-burning," said Mark. "This is the logan stone and a bit of the river."

"They'm bootiful," declared Old Coles. "Be yew a-selling o' they, Mark?"

"I am going to try and make a living that way for a time."

The pictures were far from good; the proportion was never correct; backgrounds were never quite where they should have been, and the figures somewhat resembled those seen in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts; but there was a strong touch about

them, and the colours were vivid. Mark was self-taught; but these things would sell about the villages for a shilling or two.

"I'll go about with you, if you like," he went on brusquely. "You want someone to protect you from being cheated, and I shall have to get about the country on my business. I'll be your curate," he said, the bitterness in his voice becoming still more pronounced.

"'Twould suit me fine," said Old Coles, trembling with excitement. "Us mun talk about it," he added cautiously.

"I'll come and see you to-morrow. I shall be going to Freezabeer."

Old Coles passed on rejoicing. With a strong man and a fighter behind the reins, he might be able to defy George Vid and save money for the little maiden against the day of her coming out from the asylum.

It was purple evening, and Gerard wandered from his tent during that restless time and entered the wood of the gorge. There was one colour upon everything; trees, bluebells, river, sky, hills, and the very stones of the bridge were a deep penitential blue; and out of the haze proceeded the whispering of the water and that curious whistling. It is in human nature to follow a bird when it sings through the twilight, and Gerard never doubted that it was a bird, for he knew no natural history; flint and quartz were alike stones; culvers and jays were birds; bog myrtles, tansy, rowans, and alders were plants or trees to him. He crushed the bluebells as he walked, not wilfully, and they bled when broken, pouring out ichor from the heart of their roots, and next spring they would be barren. Beneath a man's boots there is always murder going on, even while he thinks of mercy.

Deep into the wood he went, where the colour was indigo, and here the river swelled into a pool very deep and black, overhung with that uncomfortable mystery which haunts all sluggish waters surrounded by woods. Gerard stopped and listened—every evening Nature murmurs a requiem for the souls of her dead—and heard the impatient leaves muttering

like little choristers. The light seemed to depart; he moved over the mossy stones, parted the alders, looked down, then recoiled with a shudder at the horror of black water, the submerged trunk of a tree fearfully outlined, and two huge trout motionless and black as coal. It was physical weakness, the avowal of a weak character, the shock of imagination; and out of the purple mist came the idea of a white face and a man dressed as a sailor.

"Good evening, sir," he said, and stopped.

"You are the man I have been told of in the village. You haunt the woods," said Gerard, trying to see the face. It looked soft, like that of a woman, but the blue mist was on it like a dream.

"I am sorry if I disturbed you, sir—if you were thinking."

"I was not. I walked out from my tent, as I do every evening. I am camping near the bridge. Where do you sleep?"

"In the wood, under the trees. The sun wakes me, and if he fails, the birds come round and sing me out of bed."

"Where are you going now?"

"No further, sir, now that I have found you."

"Do you know me?" cried Gerard.

"I don't know you, sir, but there is someone here who does."

"Who?"

"It is along there beside the path, not very far from you. Now it is fading away. You see, sir, we are not quite alone."

"You, a sailor!" Gerard muttered.

"If there's a lot of the devil in every man, there's a bit of God too. I have a sign, sir, and it guides me. It seems to lead me wrong sometimes, but it must know best."

"Did it bring you out to find me?"

"Yes, sir. It went from rock to rock. Now it has gone."

"Have we ever met before?" said Gerard eagerly.

"Not that I know of, sir, but I can't see your face."

"Have you any matches?"

"No, sir, I left them with my bundle. I'm not a smoker."

"We will go to my tent."

It was not far: a hundred yards through the wood, across the bridge, a few steps beside the river; and there Spiller lighted a candle with his back towards Mark, turned, and said quietly, "I remember," and the sailor also said, "I remember," and then there was a great calm.

Gerard put out the candle. It seemed an unholy thing in the soft night, and they went out together and walked in the natural garden through the ferns, saying nothing for some time. It was so easy to think, so difficult to speak.

At last came the prosaic question, "How is your old father?"

"He is well, sir, I believe. I shall see him to-morrow."

"Don't call me sir. It jars after that meeting. We are not master and man."

"My father is a rough old commoner."

"Mine is a pork-butcher. Don't mention it, though."

Here was another weak touch, the other having been that shuddering recoil from the black water which Mark had noticed.

"What are you doing—what work?"

"I am curate at Fursdon. I came here to be alone for a few days and think. I cannot take the smallest step until I have rehearsed every detail. I am reading heavy books, so that I must concentrate my thoughts."

"Now I know," Mark murmured.

"What do you know?"

"Why I came out to find you. My home is in Fursdon parish. It is the battleground."

There was another interval of silence, followed by a grotesque interruption. Two men came staggering down the hill road, their bodies just visible, their noises preceding them. They too had come for a few days, not to be alone, not to think, and they were drunk. They could not plead the folly of youth. They could only offer the excuse that this was their way of happiness, to scream about the purple night, to defile the atmosphere, slobber over one another with a strange and horrible affection, and to declare how good it was to get away from the narrowness of their homes. They reached the bridge,

and each having placed his short arms about the bloated body of the other, they began to dance and sing.

"They are staying in the village, for their health, I believe," said Gerard. "I have seen them, middle-aged men, one of them quite grey."

"Is it still the same in Fursdon?" asked Mark unmoved. "Saturday-night howling and Sunday quarrels?"

"It is not as peaceable as this. There has been a good deal of fighting lately, once almost a murder. I can do nothing. I am not allowed to interfere; but I must not say anything against my rector. He thinks me advanced."

"If they take too much they are sent to prison for their own bodily protection. That is the law which has nothing to do with morality. What should be done to those who force the poison upon them?"

The fat men were waltzing on the bridge, turning round very slowly, treading on each other's feet, singing in devotional tones of flowing bowls and everlasting swilling. They were happy, but it was a black kind of happiness.

"We must work," said Mark quietly. "To say we cannot accomplish any good is no excuse."

There was a faltering movement at his side, and presently Gerard spoke, "What has happened these last four years? When I saw you in the hospital you were——"

"A chap, a hind, a carter of manure," Mark went on. "I can look back on four years of education. I have been eighteen months in college. Some day I may tell you more. Will you work with me?"

"Think of the opposition. We might as well try and roll Prestonbury across the river."

"There's a wonderful justice over us, but you can't reach it unless you appeal," said Mark, with a flash of the eloquence which comes at night-time. "Wherever I have been I heard the same thing—what's the good? One man has everything, the other nothing. There's no such thing as justice in the world. Perhaps not, but there is justice outside and very near. No

man has everything, no man has nothing; all the good he has been given, all the evil he has made for himself. One night I was sitting in my room at the college, and all at once I seemed able to realise this justice. And when I did so I felt tears running down my face."

"You cannot alter human nature," Gerard reminded him.

"But you can conquer it. You cannot cure a tiger of its longing for blood, but you can make it impossible for the tiger to reach blood. There's an old saying that you can't make men moral by Act of Parliament, but it is wrong. You can, if you enforce the law. A hundred years ago cruelty to animals was practised openly upon the streets of every great city in this country. There was no law against it. To-day such cruelty in towns is practically extinct, not because human nature has changed; men would be cruel still, but dare not, because laws have been made and are enforced. The instinct has been suppressed, the tiger cannot reach blood, and a few centuries of such suppression will kill the inclination. People will gradually become humane, and morality will have been made by Act of Parliament. Somebody must have started that agitation, one man perhaps, or two, young and unknown, standing as we are in the night and alone in the woods."

"I wish we were alone."

"Those men are sent to stimulate us," urged Mark.

"What am I to do?"

"Your duty. Your pulpit is at the corner of the street. The clergy devote themselves to their congregations, to those who do not require them. They tell people who lead strictly moral lives that they must be moral. They tell those who never touch strong drink that they must be temperate; but the immoral and the drunkard they neglect entirely. It is our duty to tell people who do not wish to hear us what they do not want to hear."

"The rector would not permit me. It would ruin my advancement."

There were quaint doings on the bridge. One of the fat

men had fallen like a hero, and the other was trying to pick him up and carry him to a place of safety. One was becoming quarrelsome, the other blasphemous, and both used the name of the Creator with the careless epithets of one calling to a dog.

"I am going about the villages," went on Mark quietly. "My work is among my own people, and, when I have done all I can, there is a place waiting for me. Will you give up everything and come with me?"

Again Gerard appeared to start away from him.

"It will be a hard life. We may get knocked about a bit. Stones may be flung at us. But it will help."

"I cannot," Gerard muttered.

"Listen to those men on the bridge. They don't know it, but they are asking for protection. Think of the dark streets in Fursdon, and the drunkards staggering along it, conscious that they have a home, though they don't know how to use it. Let us go together and remind them that if man is an animal there is no reason why he should not be a fine animal."

"I cannot," repeated Gerard. "Look here!"

He led Mark back to the tent and a little way beyond it, to a patch of smooth turf surrounded with fern, sloping to the river. Two initials glowed upon the turf, the letters E. G., each a fiery constellation composed of glow-worms which were plentiful in the gorge. Gerard had collected the little creatures, had arranged them in the form of the two initials, and since then the letters had altered but little, for the glowing beetles had hardly stirred.

It was foolish, it was even madness, and yet Mark was only a man. . . .

"Don't say anything. I know. She helped me," he said. "Could you give her up?"

"Would you?" asked Gerard almost defiantly.

"I should have to spend a week alone in the woods. Then I could."

"I should want her more. She has an unhappy home. Surely it is the first duty of a man to give happiness to the one he loves."

"It is better to give up the one he loves to help others. I know what she would wish. Has she spoken to you about it?"

"It is the sad part of clerical duty that one is almost bound to be a hypocrite," said Gerard evasively. "What I want is a town parish, a place where one is not pointed out and talked about, as he is in the country. I could work there, and I would."

"It is always the town," said Mark, "while the country goes to ruin. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Preach yourself, not the policy of cowardice, not what will please the squire and rector."

They turned from the patch of grass and the fiery letters, and went back towards the bridge. It was quiet again, for the fat men had rolled away and were arguing far up between the pines and the heather. They were getting thirsty, and there was nothing in the river which could quench that thirst. Mark and Gerard went upon the bridge, and presently the latter said, "I will try; but you must remember I am only a curate, a servant."

He looked round and found he was alone. He called, and presently Mark returned. Gerard suddenly held out both his hands and Mark took them. So they stood for some moments, while the dark clouds floated across Prestonbury, and a light seemed to enter the wood of the gorge, and all the surroundings became spiritual.

"You will help me?" asked Gerard, but his voice was hardly more than a whisper.

"You will fight?"

"I will."

"Here?"

"I will."

Their hands dropped.

"It may rain. Come back with me to the tent."

There was this difference between the young men. One was afraid of the storm, although he was protected against it; the other did not consider it, although he slept beneath the trees.

CHAPTER VII

ABOUT HOSPITALITY

Rose Ash, Vivian's home, was like its master, dark and mysterious; genial on the outside and filled internally with crooked ways. Part of the house was older than Love Lane, but many a generation had pulled it about, taking from or adding to the original building, and the result was a piece of patchwork. It was a house of doors and windowless passages; there was one room actually without windows, never used, and referred to by the squire as the chapel. The ceilings were low, the walls covered with pictures which could hardly be seen; the whole place was crammed with valuable furniture. It was more like a museum of antiquities than a dwelling-place; and most of the evening Vivian haunted the passages, his arms swinging, the eyeglasses dangling when he stooped, opening and shutting door after door, peering absent-mindedly at some picture, lighting a candle, then blowing it out, talking genially to himself, laughing at his own jokes, asking some portrait whether such a remark was not neatly made. He had nothing to do; he read little, wrote his letters in the morning when the sun entered the house; he never invited anyone to stay with him; and yet he was a generous man.

He had never practised anything. There was no necessity, as he was wealthy; but he was an able man, though he could not be natural or anything but a misanthrope; and yet he was always giving presents to those who had no need of them. Socially and politically he was useless, although he had stood for Parliament and had thrown away a safe seat, perhaps

wilfully, by jeering at the electors. He belonged to no party, but he liked the idea of socialism because it was impertinent idealism. "Perfect equality, all things in common, heavenly!" he declared; and when he caught a poor old dame gathering a few dead sticks in his woods, he had her brought before the magistrates.

Vivian and the croquet-player seldom met, though the squire attended church regularly. He liked the idea of public worship; it was democratic, intended for bringing people together and promoting that excellent state of equality which he blessed by word and condemned by action. Hosken the rector was the croquet-player. At considerable expense he had converted a rough field beside his house into one of the finest lawns in the country, and this was his parish; not even bad weather kept him out of it. His life was spent playing, watering, rolling, weed-destroying, turf-repairing; no gardener could be trusted to touch the holy thing. He breathed for croquet; his wife had become merely a partner or opponent of the game; his soul was bent like a hoop, and his mind had become a rolling ball; he walked with a stoop contracted by continually leaning to get a grip of the mallet. He called himself a great player, and in order that he might become still greater, he had engaged a curate, finding it impossible to concentrate his energies upon the higher ideal when there were lesser matters demanding his attention.

Vivian was walking in his verandah when the rector was announced. He stopped, fumbled with his collar as if it had suddenly become too tight, and asked, "What have you done with him?"

"He is in the library, sir."

"He'll read my letters," the squire muttered, then went indoors and found Hosken standing in an uncomfortable attitude before one of the few windows, looking out upon the fields and magnifying them into croquet-lawns. He was a large, red-faced man, and looked more like a prosperous farmer than a clergyman.

The usual remarks about nothing were exchanged, and then Hosken said nervously, "I have come to see you about the curate. You know I always like to consult you about the parish. I let him preach in the evenings, not in the mornings, when you attend, as I feel it my duty to say a few words then. I regret to say he has lately shocked me exceedingly by the most heterodox opinions, not to say blasphemy."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a sheet of manuscript. "You will remember I told you when he came I very much feared he was not a gentleman."

"We are all gentlefolk now," said Vivian. "I always touch my hat to the labourers, and at the present moment some ladies are preparing my dinner."

"I have made inquiries about him. I understand his father is a tradesman who saves money."

"I don't know that the country is any the worse for trade and domestic economy," said the squire, walking about the room, chuckling to himself. "Soap, liquid-beef, and half-penny shockers, they buy us all out in time. My ancestors couldn't do much except sit a horse and curse sublimely, and I can't do either. What's the boy been preaching about? He's a good-looking youth. I must ask him to dine."

"He will corrupt the parish," groaned Hosken. He was so large and incompetent. Some people can be in a room and remain unnoticed, but anyone would have known Hosken was present, even if he had been hidden behind a screen. He was like a stony hill looming from a flat landscape, unavoidable, oppressive, and only in the way.

"Presumably," muttered Vivian, "the curate has not mastered the thirty-nine articles of croquet"; then aloud, "You can't corrupt the people unless you are ingenious enough to create a new religion. There are no young people in these days except grandparents."

"I had to engage a curate. I have been completely run down with all the work and worry. The strain upon me was dreadful," said Hosken pitifully.

"I have always supposed that we engage servants to keep ourselves occupied. If I were a busy man I should certainly do my own work," said the squire. "As I am idle, I can afford the time to compel others to work for me. There is a vulgar saying, 'If you'll work I'll sweat.' I need hardly mention it is the servant speaking."

Hosken was smoothing the sheet of manuscript, his hands shaking, for he was suffering from every nerve complaint imaginable. He was horribly afraid of Vivian, but regarded him as the prop upon which the entire parochial system depended.

"This is a very serious matter," he said shakily. "I am terribly shocked." The poor man looked it. He had not played a respectable game of croquet for days, and that, too, was serious, as an important tournament was impending. "I instructed him to preach every Sunday evening, some simple matter of faith and morals, I told him, especially morals. That is so important. The text to be taken from the gospel for the day. He has not obeyed my instructions."

"You are not going to close the church, I hope?" asked Vivian hurriedly.

"He takes the afternoon services at St Paul's." This was an ancient granite chapel in the middle of Fursdon "town," the parish church being some distance away. "It is too far for me, and I gave him entire charge, after reminding him he had my confidence. This he has abused. Instead of preaching, he reads the congregation what he calls extracts from classical masterpieces, attempting to justify his conduct, which I feel sure is illegal, by declaring that men of genius express themselves better than he can."

"Ask him to preach in the mornings," murmured Vivian; but the remark was not heard.

"He reads extracts from profane writers, scoffers, freethinkers; astronomy, philosophy, history. It is so dangerous. Last Sunday he read a portion of *Paradise Lost* while standing in the pulpit, and made no reference whatever to the gospel for the day."

"I don't know that I should regard Milton as a particularly profane writer," said Vivian smoothly.

"Why, the man was a Quaker, a Calvinist, a shocking fellow theologically. Spiller has done worse, much worse. One week-day evening he read Washington Irving's account of the tombs in Westminster Abbey, shockingly secular from beginning to end. He says the people like it, but, as I told him, they have no business to like it. He should give readings in the school-room if he must be profane. And last week he gave statistics dealing with the sale of intoxicating liquor."

"I am sure that would interest them."

"Apart from the profanity of dealing with such a subject in a consecrated building, it was so unfair, so one-sided," said Hosken, with some heat, as he was financially interested. "No doubt the figures were grossly exaggerated and nobody could answer him. I felt it my duty last Sunday morning, as you would have noticed, to make a few remarks upon the miracle at Cana, and I reminded the congregation that they might lawfully regard beer in much the same sense as bread, namely, as a staff of life, though of course it is liable to be abused like anything else."

"So far, we have not discovered any particular exhilaration of spirits following a bout of bread-stuffing," was Vivian's comment.

"From that sort of thing to politics is only a step. I feel sure Spiller is a radical. He will be setting the whole parish against me, undoing all my years of hard work. I have heard he is friendly with the nonconformist ministers. It is a grave scandal. He ought to be honest and leave the church."

"If he is modest enough to refrain from preaching, he ought to be rewarded with a deanery."

"I pray you not to give him a living," cried Hosken.

"I have only one in my gift, and that is held by a gentleman with pronounced finger-nails who breeds pigs."

"I come to the principal charge," Hosken said, going near

the window and fumbling with the sheet of paper. "Last Sunday evening I was prevented from being present at evensong by a bad attack of nerves. Vivian, the young man preached an outrageous sermon in our parish church."

"Its walls have stood a good deal. I believe they were bombarded in the dear old days when nobody was free and everybody fought for that blessed thing principle," said the jeering squire.

"Why he should have referred to Good Friday I cannot tell you, as that solemn festival is over," Hosken went on. "But he is so inconsistent. I fear the young man has also a morbid mind. He has, moreover, a kind of eloquence which is to me personally most irritating. 'I want to mention one of our days of rejoicing,' he said. I am now reading you Spiller's own words. I made him write them out for me, as it was absolutely necessary to obtain documentary evidence. You will notice the shocking levity of this remark, though he assured me his manner in the pulpit was serious. This is how he went on: 'I imagined that an infidel stranger came to visit me and asked to be shown my country. We went out together and passed through the land. It was Good Friday, and the weather was fine. When we had gone some distance my companion turned to me and said, "Surely this is some great day with you?" and I answered, "It is." "A national holiday?" he went on, and I replied, "That is so." Then the infidel stranger remarked, "I see upon every side people making holiday and signs of great rejoicing. Perhaps your country has won a great victory; the people have emerged from a time of distress, they see happiness and prosperity ahead of them, and they are thanking their Gods because they have been allowed to triumph?" I answered him, "You are wrong. The people believe that on this day, many years ago, the God whom they worship was tortured and put to death under the form of a man. They regard it as the most sacred and solemn day in all the year." The stranger answered, "Then why are they rejoicing?" and I replied, "I do not

know." Again we went on, and presently the infidel turned to me and said, "I see clearly the people do not believe in this God. They regard him as an impostor." "You are wrong again," I told him. "Not only do they believe, but if you were to try and alter their religion, even in the smallest and most unimportant particular, they would be ready to kill you; and if you told them you could not accept their religion, they would hardly receive you into their houses." Then the infidel shook his head and said, "I cannot understand what you say."' In the same dreadful strain of levity he proceeded to draw the moral," concluded Hosken, folding the paper and turning from the window.

Vivian was in a low chair, shaking with laughter. "The hammer upon the head of the nail. This is the sort of man who might tell a dissolute monarch that he was dissolute. Poor thing, he won't make episcopal bones; he will feed with the lean kine."

"I want your advice. Don't you think I ought to mention this to the bishop?" asked Hosken.

"What's the young man done, beyond speaking the truth?"

"It is not right to speak like that to uneducated people. It is introducing the methods of the Salvation Army into the church. He will be coming here to ask if your soul is saved."

"I hope he will. I should be delighted."

"This incident does not stand alone. He ought not to be allowed to preach. I regard him as a dangerous young man," said the frightened rector. "If he were appointed to an important charge he might say something which would inflame public opinion."

"And wake the church up," added Vivian. "That would be a pity, now that it is in a nice, healthy sleep. Let the boy alone," he went on almost roughly. "This is nothing but high spirits. They will soon wear out with a little snubbing and then he will bleat in the orthodox way."

"I do think you are not sufficiently serious," protested Hosken nervously. In his heart he regarded Vivian as a

hopeless infidel, which, as a wealthy man, he had a perfect right to be.

"Will you talk to him, explain how he has pained me, and beg him to refrain from bad company?"

"Yes, I'll ask him to dinner."

"I must say something about the matter of bad company," Hosken continued "Do you remember a young man called Mark Yeo?"

"Son of Polyphemus Yeo who hurls rocks about," replied Vivian, with an awkward movement. "I know he has been away, has returned with a polish, and is, I hear, making himself rather a nuisance."

"He is more than a nuisance," said Hosken warmly. "He is, I fear, a bit of a scoundrel, and he has certainly obtained some influence over Spiller. Here is my curate, whom I try to treat as a gentleman, going about with the illegitimate son——"

"You are wrong there."

"I am not. Old Will Yeo contracted an unholy alliance with his wife's sister."

"Ecclesiastically illegitimate. Well?" said the squire.

"Going about with this man who is stumping the country, preaching rebellion against the law, and prophesying all kinds of disasters if the public-houses aren't closed."

"I did hope we had come to an end of the prophets. There are no miracles, I trust?" sneered Vivian, in his good-humoured way.

Hosken looked utterly distressed, and his red face quivered. He felt he was being ridiculed, had not the wit to answer nor the humour to understand, and had an idea just then that the world was against him.

"The cares of a country clergyman's life are enough to drive him mad," he said with real earnestness. "What with people defying authority, denying my divine commission, tenants not paying, servants giving notice, the horror of infectious diseases which prostrates me whenever I visit the

sick, incessant bother with the churchwardens, the walk from the rectory to the church, I have often been unable to eat my dinner, and been so exhausted and worried as not to close my eyes the whole night. The gentry must hang together, Vivian. We are in danger of ruin if men like this Yeo get the upper hand. Dividends are falling—one brewery company in which I have a small interest is in liquidation, and I shudder when I think my wife and little son may be left unprovided for. You may laugh, but I assure you the country is passing through a very critical stage, and if we are to beat these Yeos, we must fight shoulder to shoulder; and if they win, God help us! I verily believe, Vivian, we shall get our heads chopped off."

"It is very good of you to come here and amuse me," said the squire. "I do not anticipate any withering wind of a local revolution, nor can I imagine Mark Yeo exhibiting our decapitated heads to the howling mob of Fursdon. The whole matter resolves itself into the question of a few less beer-houses. That is the top and bottom of this Spiller-Yeo agitation. But countryfolk make such a fuss about trifles, because big things never come their way, and they possess a knack of forgetting they are little fishes and imagining they are whales."

"It is the religious side of the question which appeals to me, and that only," said Hosken fervently, as he turned to one of the numerous doors; and Vivian instantly made for another, passed through, and could be heard laughing his way down a passage. He did not profess politeness, and to leave his visitor abruptly was less tedious than talking him out gradually.

"The religious side!" he muttered. "It is the side upon which the value of the note is printed. All religion is blasphemy. When I see Hosken kneeling, I think of a dog begging for a piece of sugar, and when he prays I am reminded of the same animal yapping at his master. That Mark Yeo is genuine—too much so. I must help him, to

see how far he can go without overstepping himself. I like Spiller, he's genuine too, and I'll help him. I like them both, poor things!"

Gerard was in his cottage, somewhat depressed, for he had been to see Edith, upon a little matter of church accounts which included his own interest, and had been told she was attending upon the mistress and could not be interviewed. So he was writing to her instead, and had just reached the second sheet of details, when a big, stooping figure darkened his window, a pair of eyeglasses rattled against the sash, and he looked out to see Vivian poking among the creepers as if looking for birds' nests. Gerard hurried to the door. He possessed that common weakness, a profound respect for the aristocracy, and for the squire he entertained a feeling of veneration, which was not lessened by the fact that he could not understand him. Whatever Vivian did must be right, for it was well known that he liked every man and never harmed a living thing.

"I don't apologise for not having called upon you before, because you would not believe me, and I should not mean it," said the squire. "I pay no attention to social duties. Come and dine to-night. Don't pat the dog, or he'll bite. You may bestow all your affection upon me. Do you drink Burgundy?"

"Thank you very much. I shall be glad to come," said Gerard. "I am a teetotaler," he added quietly.

"I have some good Burgundy. You shall try it. Good-bye for the present. Half-past-seven. I am going on to eject some bad tenants."

Vivian lurched off, as abruptly as he had come, with his bear-like movements, and when he reached the cottage occupied by the unworthy tenants he spoke to them in his most amiable manner, and, so far from turning them out, promised to perform some repairs; which was exactly what Gerard thought he would do.

To dine at Rose Ash was a kind of success, a step upward; to enlist the sympathies of Vivian would be a triumph; and

Gerard was excited as he walked to the house. How proudly his father would mix the sausage-meat if someone could whisper that his son was dining that night with an aristocrat. The young man had a right to the pride which preceded the stumble. He had not been born a gentleman, but he was acquiring gentility; he was not used to the gentry, stood somewhat in awe of them, hardly understood them, but he desired to become one of them. There was a little snobbery in Gerard, unavoidable because of heredity; even his father had one smile for the lord of the manor and another for the next-door tradesman. If it was a fault, the blame must fall upon Nature, who makes one plant sensitive, another prickly, a third creeping, and a fourth poisonous.

Gerard did not like the look of Rose Ash. It seemed hard and unkind. The old iron gates were spiked, the drive was covered with sharp stones, the grass was long, slimy with moisture, and huge brambles reached out of the shrubberies like snakes. Vivian liked what he called a methodical state of untidiness. Patches of damp smeared the sides of the house. And yet there was no appearance of neglect. The place suggested that its owner had found it a pleasant garden, and had spent money in turning it into a wilderness. The grass had been left to make it a wild garden; the brambles looked as if they had been planted there; even the thatch upon the lodge had a curious appearance of disorder, as if it had been made so by the order of the squire.

There was plenty of light upon the grass, but little inside the house, where there was a sense of going back two hundred years. Pictures and furniture were antique, although it was not easy to see them; they were barely visible like rocks of Dartmoor in a mist. Gerard was conducted through one hall into another dark as a cave, into a windowless passage like the shaft of a mine, then through door after door until he could not have found his way back into the garden without luck or a clue, and finally into the library which was Vivian's living-room and was connected with a bedroom. Here the squire passed

his time, the greater part of the big house useless—he hardly knew the way about it himself—most of the rooms consigned to the damp, worm-bored, forgotten. Not that he was miserly; he spent generously and gave magnificently, a Pandora's box to any man. In winter he occupied the bedroom by the library; but in the warm weather he slept far away, in a room at the far end of the house which he called Tibet, because it was high up and not easy to get at. He enjoyed the expeditions to and fro, and was able to make his choice between several different routes.

The library seemed to be a den of dogs; but there were only two, one in a low chair, the other beneath the table. Both snarled and the man-servant, a stiff-jointed, sleepy-looking man, who might have been an automaton kept in a cupboard when not required and galvanised into activity as occasion demanded, remarked in his master's style, "Only one of 'em bites, sir."

Gerard made no experiments with a view to discovering which was the biting one. He stood in the centre of the room like an explorer in the desert, and thought he was alone with the wild beasts; but the man was still at the door and said, "Mr Vivian will be down in one minute, sir." Then there was the sound of a door closing, a curtain falling into place, and the dogs decided on war.

A Devonshire minute passed, equal to ten elsewhere, before Gerard, who had barricaded himself in a corner, heard the sound of relief. There was a distant vibration as of an earthquake, the hollow sound of distant doors closing, the creaking of a flight of stairs, the quick tread of slippered feet, a voice calling in the passages, doors again bursting open with sharp reports, a kind of explosion in the room, and then a genial voice, "I am so pleased to see you. You drink champagne? I have ordered you champagne. And you must try the old brandy. Now you must both behave, or I'll turn you out." This was to the dogs who were behaving then as if they were toothless.

Gerard emerged from his corner and explained his conduct.

"This is the culprit," said Vivian. "He goes about biting

people with my name on his collar. It is really very amusing. Dinner will be ready in one minute. It is very good of you to come." Then he sat down at the table, lighted half-a-dozen candles, and examined his letters, ignoring his guest completely; and so another Devonshire minute went by before the door opened and a tragic whisper sounded, "Dinner is ready, sir."

The squire took no heed. Another of those minutes passed, then he jumped up, muttering to himself, "I must really request that man not to be a damned fool. Everybody writes to me when there is any trouble. They seem to think I have the keys of hell and death. I always think I am a very middle-class sort of person."

He took up a candle and went out, lighting himself along the passage, entered the dining-room, and sat down to the soup. The butler approached and discharged another tragic whisper, "Covers for two, sir."

The next moment Vivian was back in the library. "It is very good of you to come and dine with me. Dinner is quite ready. Come along. You must try the old rum."

Gerard followed almost terrified; but they did not enter the dining-room, for Vivian took the turning which led into the main passage and, opening door after door, ushered the curate into huge, silent rooms full of furniture wrapped up like dead bodies and haunted by those ticking sounds which occupy deserted houses. "The bats get in sometimes as they do in the church. I believe they get in there just to annoy Hosken. He worries so—poor thing. He says it is so irreverent of the bats. This is the drawing-room. I shall marry some day."

Gerard was almost tongue-tied, but he managed to mutter something conventional.

"This will be the nursery when I marry," the squire went on, pushing open another door disclosing nothing but darkness and damp. "A nice, bright room when the sun shines, with a pleasant aspect. Just the room for children. I should like to hear them pattering about the passages. I am sure it would amuse me."

"I hope it will be soon," said Gerard, staring at the stooping figure with its huge, ugly head, wondering if he could be serious. He was hard upon sixty, a man of settled and fantastic tastes; he was always talking about matrimony and would babble of it as he lay dying of old age.

"I shall marry some day. It will amuse me to put the house in order. I haven't the least idea what I possess, and only yesterday I found myself in a room where I had never been before. I like Mrs Allen," the squire went on in his absent-minded way. "And I like Miss Gribbin too. Do you like Miss Gribbin?"

"Yes," answered Gerard gently.

"I must ask them to tea and open the drawing-room. It will do us all good. Dinner is quite ready. It is very good of you to come. You shall try the old port. I think we are going the right way."

They reached the dining-room and sat down to the cold soup. The butler approached with the decanter of sherry, and Gerard declined.

"I quite agree with you," said Vivian, who noticed everything. "I don't care for sherry either. It deadens the palate. I always make a point of drinking the same as my guests."

Suddenly Gerard found himself wishing he had not come. He felt dazed and silly; it might have been the hideous room, the damp heat of the place or the overwhelming personality at the head of the table, or the drugged stare of the butler behind him; perhaps it was the sight of that array of glasses near his plate, or it might have been a feeling that he occupied a position to which he was not entitled by birth; but more probably it was the knowledge that he was utterly in the power of the squire. He could not find any words; he talked nonsense; and all the time he was longing to get away.

"No, thank you," he said hastily. The neck of a bottle entered his vision as the butler was about to fill his glass with champagne.

"My dear young man, I ordered it expressly for you."

"I am a teetotaler," said Gerard.

"We are all teetotalers nowadays, because half the wine is made of chemicals. I can guarantee this. My guests must drink with me, if it is only out of kindness, for if they refuse I must"; and Vivian pushed out his glass, as if impatient to begin.

"I drink water on principle," said Gerard.

"Principle again," cried Vivian, in a voice which rolled along the cloister-like passages. "I really do think principle is the most amusing of all things. Some day I shall murder a man on principle. Give me your opinion on the wine. Your palate should be in a good condition if you have not been drinking lately," he said, in his fine way.

It was horrible to go on resisting before the mocking host and the dumb manservant; but Gerard gathered up his courage and refused firmly.

Vivian rose, took the bottle from the man, placed a hand on Gerard's shoulder, and with a disdainful "I must really request you not to be a damned fool," filled his glass. Returning to his seat, he lifted his own, and, in a courtly manner which he had not shown before, observed, "I hope you will often dine with me," and drank. Hardly knowing what he did, only feeling he must not insult the host, and run the risk of being sworn at, Gerard did likewise.

There was a framed card hanging in his bedroom, testifying to the fact that one Gerard Spiller had sworn an oath before witnesses not to take intoxicating liquor in any form, for the good of his own soul, and as an example to others. It was very likely an unwise thing to do, but the fact remained that it had been done; and now the card would testify to another fact, namely, that the same Gerard Spiller was a perjurer.

"There is much to be said in favour of your opinion that dram-drinking is not desirable," Vivian was saying amiably, the glasses having been refilled. "I am against the habit myself. Good fellowship does not require to be reduced to a liquid, but drinking at dinner is quite another matter. It

promotes conversation, aids digestion, gives one a feeling of rest and contentment. When I hear the stupid outcry of the faddists against liquor, I say to myself, 'Good wine is costly, and these poor things cannot afford it. Therefore they go about crying, "Because I can't afford it, you are a brute if you want it."' You cannot avoid alcohol because it enters into food. That piece of bread you are eating contains an appreciable amount of it."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Gerard. Anything to relieve his mind.

"I am quite convinced. Your fanatical teetotaler is not a scientist, and is not, so far as I know, much of a success in life."

"But he does good——"

"He fertilises the atmosphere with a lot of superfluous oxygen, and quite possibly he makes a decent living out of it. We are not good for nothing, you may depend," said the squire. "When you see a man standing with a crowd round him, and hear him saying that he is a miserable sinner, and has been saved, and he hopes others will step up and be saved too, you may be certain a bag will go round presently."

"But the men who frequent the public-houses, beat their wives, ruin their homes?" cried Gerard. He was able to speak now.

"Large numbers of people have no kind of self-restraint. They remind me of French furniture," said Vivian. "Dam up one passion, and another breaks out. Take away their liquor, and they will indulge in something worse. If drink is their only joy, let them have it."

"You might as well say let them commit suicide if they want to."

"Certainly. I cannot imagine why the law makes such a fuss about suicide. If it amuses a man to kill himself, let him do so. His body is his own."

"What will you drink, sir?" whispered the galvanised butler.

"What will you have now? Mr Spiller will try the Burgundy. We will have the old port as well. The trouble with these men is that they always drink the same thing," Vivian went on. "Beer night after night, heavy stuff too, like treacle—no beer worth drinking is made in this country—and it turns them into sots. If I drank it I should be soon kicking the dogs and smashing the furniture. We mix our drinks and deliver ourselves from evil. Hosken drinks new port—poor thing. Now you must try the Burgundy."

Gerard drank what was given him. He was young and weak. Vivian was old and strong. The pervert is always reckless, and when the position has been abandoned there is nothing to fight for. But he had hardly ever tasted wine, and the portraits on the wall were beginning to leer.

"I hear you have annoyed Hosken," the host went on. "It seems you are corrupting the people by preaching the pure gospel. You must marry, and then we'll put you into a quiet living where you can gather moss. Marriage is a good thing for the clergy. I should like you to marry," said Vivian affectionately. "You would never be outspoken again. Here is the old brandy. Now you must try this. It is very precious."

Then there came a kind of blank, during which Gerard was not conscious of anything except some foolish laughter. Afterwards he seemed to be divided into two personalities, one of which was leaning over the table in a dizzy and excited state, and the other, sane and cold, was preaching just as he himself would have done had he seen anyone in his condition.

"What will you drink, sir?" whispered the drugged butler for the last time.

"What shall we take with our coffee? Bring the old rum. Mr Spiller will like the old rum."

A hot, yellow mist was in the room, and through it came sounds of cynical laughter and the glance of two kind eyes.

"You must dine with me next Monday," the amiable voice was saying. "I shall be anxious to hear how the Sunday evening service goes. Don't be afraid of offending Hosken if

you can please the people. You know what the voice of the people is, and if you can amuse me I shall be most grateful. I will help you, Spiller. I will give you a living, and if you like to breed pigs, you shall. Do you feel the heat?" the squire asked anxiously. 'Perhaps you would rather go into the library?"

He rose and pushed his chair back, then walked gravely round the table. "An old custom," he said. "If you can walk round the table without making a mistake, you have dined well. If you stumble, there has been an error of judgment somewhere. It will be cooler in the library, and you shall try the old whisky."

He went to the door, and Gerard discovered that he was alone and expected to follow. He, too, left his chair, and immediately he did so a strong hand seemed to seize and throw him against the table. He staggered into the passage, made a few steps, then slipped upon the polished floor. It was not a pleasant sight. Only a hardened sinner could have laughed at the frightful earnestness with which he tried to rise and hide what could not be hidden.

"Mr Vivian is in the library, sir," said a voice, and the butler appeared through the yellow mist.

Then it appeared to Gerard that he tumbled through a number of doors into another place of yellow light, and heard the dogs snarling again; and stretched out in a low chair was a great figure, as rigid as a corpse, and snoring loudly, and beside him was more liquor and a cursed lot of glasses. Vivian was fast asleep, and as Gerard looked it seemed as if the ugly face was grinning in a kind of mirth.

He got back into the passage, knowing that it was necessary to escape. Door after door he opened, and once was conscious of a flood of hot light and the giggling of maid-servants. At last he found the right one, and felt nothing else until brambles scratched his face as he bent upon the grass in all the obscenity of drunkenness.

CHAPTER VIII

ABOUT DWELLING-PLACES

HERE is the method of spoiling a beautiful hill-side where blue-firs and copper-beeches make a background: you erect a square house without gables, place windows at regular intervals and a door in the midst, until a close resemblance to some village idiot's face is secured; you roughcast the exterior, add a coat of whitewash, so that the house shall glare like a sin against the firs and beeches; then you cut a rigid terrace or two, dispel any inclination towards human vanity by planting churchyard trees with sepulchral urns between, and sprinkle the place moderately with art in the shape of stucco Venuses. Such was the house occupied by Mrs Allen. It was visible in its white nakedness for miles; every bend in the road and out it flashed. From the rocky plats on Dartmoor it was more troublesome than a tender conscience.

Edith was washing china and listening for footsteps. Mrs Allen was a delicate person, suffering from all those diseases which grow out of idleness, bad-temper, and too much money; her poor head could not endure any noise, such as Edith singing, although a man might howl into her ear and not discompose her if he was a man of her own set. She belonged to a type of woman not uncommon, but little heard of, because they practise in secret, do not boast of their deeds openly, and they are artistic in appearance, painted to resemble the real thing, and they worship anyone in power, loyally support the church and constitution, decorate churches, press their clergy to play at popery; and when they see some poor thing

wriggling near their feet, the last state of that thing has come.

Mrs Allen was the ripe fruit of indolence; brought up by wealthy parents, there was nothing for her to do except tread on worms; married to a wealthy husband, there was nothing for it but to tread on him—he, more fortunate than the worms, had legs, and for some years had been careful to keep a few oceans between himself and his wife—settled in the hideous white house, time could only be passed by trampling on creatures, not servants, but those who had no relations to interfere, such as Edith and other small animals. Mrs Allen would not have tormented a cow; for one thing, she would have been afraid of the creature, and the cow is a large animal which can feel. According to Mrs Allen, small creatures had no feelings.

The strength of tyranny occupied the neurotic body of Mrs Allen, and with it that commonest of passions, the desire to punish and the lust to lay stripes upon a human body. Had she been given power on the large scale, she would have been an Elizabeth of Russia; as she was only tyrant in a small way, she destroyed little beasts and tried to destroy Edith, who was after all only a workhouse brat with no other home to run to. A woman in power is always a danger, because the time is sure to come when she loses control over herself; even Elizabeth of England murdered her favourites. Nobody suspected Mrs Allen of wielding the rod of iron. She was too weak, a dear little creature, such a sportswoman; but within these great ugly houses anywhere uglier deeds take place, and nobody hears of them because shame and helplessness keep shut the mouths of girls who know what it is to be beaten in the night, when the lights are out, so that no faces need be revealed.

The footsteps sounded at last. Edith stopped singing, the door opened, and the perfect sportswoman entered. Certainly she did not look delicate, and her nerves seemed to be under perfect control. She wore short skirts, thick-nailed boots, brown gauntlets, and a heavy veil to protect her artistic features

from the sun or to conceal her identity from Heaven. She carried a pole six feet long, and distributed about her clothes were various trophies, the *disjecta membra* of slaughtered birds and beasts. She was like a wild woman of Borneo, who had never been brought into contact with the ways of civilisation, and so went about decorated with portions of animals, according to the custom of her tribe.

"Of course you are not coming to the otter-hunt?" she said fretfully, as if the world was all wrong and she had not the time nor the inclination to set it right.

"No, thank you," replied Edith.

"If you were any good you could come and hold my stick," fretted Mrs Allen.

"You know my opinions by this time. If the poor creatures must be kept under, why don't they shoot them?"

"Silly ass!" cried Mrs Allen. "What sport would there be in that?"

Edith did not reply. She knew Mrs Allen would not be happy until she had smelt some blood.

"You get all that nonsense from your stupid plebeian father. My poor sister was a decent creature until he got hold of her."

"She had her eyes opened," said Edith warmly. "She told me how she helped you once to suffocate a cat. You shut the poor thing up in a cupboard and smoked it to death with a piece of sulphur. The thought was a misery to my mother ever afterwards. It was the last thing she spoke about."

Mrs Allen looked awkward. It was not easy to explain the incident; but she muttered something about experimenting in the interests of science, which made Edith smile scornfully.

"A girl without property has no right to an opinion," she went on. "Otter-hunting is one of the finest and noblest of sports, and it is healthy too. All the best people turn out."

"And get drunk," Edith murmured.

"They do nothing of the kind. After wading about in the water they must take something to keep the cold out. A few

farmers make beasts of themselves perhaps. You are quite unable to distinguish between drunkenness and excitement," said Mrs Allen. "I expect I shall bring young Luxmoore back to dinner," she added.

"In that case I will stay in my room."

"I'll have nothing more to do with you, then," cried the little sportswoman angrily. "Here I am doing all I can to——"

"Get rid of me," finished Edith sweetly.

"To marry you respectably," said Mrs Allen, who was not in the least anxious to get rid of her.

"I suppose you will say he is only excitable?"

"He does drink, I admit. Why shouldn't he? He is young and rich. He can do as he likes."

"You took me to that ball and made me dance with Mr Luxmoore," said Edith, in a fine, healthy burst of anger. "He was so drunk that he could hardly stand. He breathed at me and insulted me, called me a ripping little girl, a damned nice little girl, and he never apologised afterwards; and you said it was nothing, and I was a fool to take any notice of it——"

"Oh, do stop your beastly noise! Everybody knows Dick Luxmoore. He is a bit rough, but he's a very good sort. You ought to know by this time there is something in the air of this country which makes men indulge rather freely. If you practised what you preached, you would have a little charity, marry the man and reform him."

"I won't be insulted by him."

"You had better go and sell matches in the street, then," replied Mrs Allen.

She adjusted her veil, tramped off, while Edith ran up to her room and enjoyed a little refreshing solitude.

There was plenty to do that day, which was a whole holiday. Edith was to meet Gerard that afternoon at Godbeer, which was an abandoned wheal surrounded by a ring of storm-tossed firs on the slope of the moor. It was approached by an old

stone avenue like a corridor, leading to the temple, which had fallen into ruins, and as it was not far from Freezabeer, Edith decided to visit Will Yeo and ask for news about Mark. She had heard various rumours which suggested that the partner of Old Coles was not receiving honour in his own country, and this seemed to be a sign that he was doing his duty.

All Edith's troubles left her on the moor, not falling off exactly, but becoming light and imperceptible. She ran and laughed, jumped over the solemn rocks, and threw out her hands like a child to the butterflies. The air was soaked with wine; why add stimulant to stimulant and adulteration to purity? It was so good to be alone, out of that bloody atmosphere of hybrids. The old monk was right; the fighting-man who sought the cloister was right. Seclusion is the only life, out of the dust, the bad smells, away from the deeds of despotism and the strong smell of blood. The quiet cell, the calm arches of the corridor, and beyond the gardens with swallows darting round the sundial and the old flowers always young and fragrant, and afterwards the still blue evening and the compline bell; no voices, only whispers to blend with the murmuring of insects and gentle figures, with their faces hidden, moving apart, thinking, dreaming, and with the required passage or the sought-for line obtained, returning to their cells to take the pen again—that is how great works have grown. And love grows there, too, without the aid of women, for love is nothing but a striving after what the mind holds to be best; but when it becomes base, the garden fades, gentleness departs, and the thinker must seek the dust again, the bad smells, and the faces of senseless laughter.

Freezabeer was one of the contemptible wonders of Dartmoor. Even the itinerant artist passed it as a kind of eyesore. The impression carried away by a glance was something after this fashion: a piece of stony ground whereon chickens disported and three ducks waddled one after the other, never more or less than a trinity, and always in the

same order, duck three not attempting to take precedence over duck two. Beyond the stony ground was a fence made of those things which people throw away, eked out with furze. A fence of frying-pans, iron and rags, scraps of harness and many brambles, was surely a wonder, and yet people did not stop to gaze at it. From the fence a flight of stone steps led up to the main and only entrance, solid slabs of granite placed one above the other, and down these steps trickled a green waterfall. As for the dwelling-place, the impression carried away of that was always confusing. There was a huge rose-bush of the wild variety, evidently of very great age; there were also stones which had once been whitened, and windows all crooked, as if the winds had blown them awry, not many windows, but enough. Of the door there was no distinct impression; there were pieces of board nailed here and there, and sheets of corrugated iron, but how all these things made the dwelling-place was the climax of the wonder. It was built into the side of the moor, and above it trickled a discharge from the bogs, passed down the furrows of the iron roof, to form the waterfall which graced the steps. This was where Mark had been born and bred. A miserable and contemptible thing it looked, a home to be condemned as an insanitary eyesore; but it contained something, another wonder perhaps: happiness was therein. The whole place was not worth a handful of coins, but it held that which was too expensive for money.

"How nice!" exclaimed Edith when she stepped inside. Everything looked comfortable and clean; all the patches and wounds were on the outside, and here in the living-room was a floor of concrete with a wax-like surface, a huge fireplace and cloam-oven, and three crooks, all of them named, Annie's Crook, Mark's Crook, Father's Crook; neat curtains were at the windows, fastened back with rose-coloured ribbons, the dresser made a brave show, and Old Will's easy chair had two fat cushions stuffed with fern. A tiny flight of steps jutted into the room, like a peninsula, bare but shining with

polish, and upstairs were two little rooms equally clean and neat.

Old Will was there, one-eyed and wonderful, having just done eating, and Annie stood beside the table talking to him. She ruled the old man absolutely, saw that he never handled the money, sent him to bed, told him to get up. It was good discipline but strange to see this man who fought granite being led and managed by soft flesh. Had it not been for Annie, the trusting old fellow would often have fallen into the hands of drunkards; but Will was never allowed to enter Fursdon except on Sundays, and then Annie helped him on with the black coat, sent him to chapel, told him which way to go and return, and he always obeyed her. He was given a penny to put into the plate, and he carried it in his hand, and generally gave it over before the service started, "vor dread o' drapping mun."

Annie certainly belonged to the cloister. She was dark, bright-eyed with the eagerness of short-sight, aged about thirty —Old Will had no children by his first wife—and she was unnatural, or at least people thought so, and not without reason, because she hated men, never went into the village except on business, and when men passed the time of day she barely answered, did not look at them, shrank from them as if they had been creatures from another world. Marriage to her seemed an impossibility; she appeared to lack all the passions, she could not get into a temper; her idea of a holiday was a lonely walk. She could not understand why people liked to walk together.

"Come in, miss, please," said Annie. "Father has finished dinner."

Old Will sat on a high-legged stool, what was left of his hands resting upon his hard knees, his red face burning its way out of the fuzzy white tangle of hair. The longing was on him to get back to the plats; but Annie had not told him he might go, and without permission he could not stir.

"How are you, Mr Yeo?" said Edith.

"Father is very healthy, miss. He eats more than twice as much as Mark. He is very healthy," said Annie admiringly.

The dish gave evidence. Not only was it empty, but it was clean, for a piece of bread had been scrubbed across its surface, removing the uttermost drop of gravy.

"You don't smoke," exclaimed Edith.

"I wouldn't give him the money if he wanted it," said Annie, though Edith thought it strange that the man who owned the money should have no right to it.

"Only time I ever smocked," said Will, "I put the pipe into my mouth on Dry Arch and smocked till I got up through on the plats, and then I spat the pipe out o' my mouth and said, 'Never no more.' A smocker blows away sixpence a day," said Will. "Drippence he loses hisself, and drippence he takes from his master. He sots down under the hedge wi' his mate and 'em ha' their lunch. Then 'em ses, 'Reckon I'll ha' a pipe o' baccy,' so 'em gets out their pipes and each tells his tale, and 'em knocks their pipes agin their butes and fills mun up two or dree times while 'em tells, and half an hour be soon gone."

Annie was beneath the vault-like archway of the fireplace, preparing the oven for bread-baking, and Edith crossed to her side, anxious to learn the method.

"There aren't many cloam-ovens now, miss. Only old-fashioned folk use them," said Annie. "Stoves are in all the cottages now."

"Aw," snorted Old Will. "If yew puts meat into iron he tastes of iron."

"It's the old way of cooking, and I reckon it's still the best," said Annie, picking up a long stick, which she explained was the scouring-pole used for clearing the oven. "I put in a piece of vuzz and set a light to it. Then I lay in the dry twigs——"

"Mossy-trade," interrupted her father. "Us allus puts in mossy-trade, vor he gives a flavour."

"These sticks are covered with moss," said Annie. "It

takes about half an hour to heat the oven, miss; it gets white-hot, then I scour it and put the bread in and shut the door."

"Then her gets into the garden and looks at the posies, vor there b'ain't nought to du else," explained Will. "'Tis the best bread in the world what comes out o' thikky oven."

"Baker's bread is no good to father. He would want a loaf for every meal."

"Baker's trade," said the old man scornfully. "I'd ha' to et all day vore I filled my belly, and then I'd crave."

"When we are short of wood I heat the oven with turves."

"He be a proper flavour tu," cried Old Will.

"It takes longer. See the crooks, miss?" said Annie, slipping them up and down. "Look how clean I keep them."

"Aw, Annie be a gude maiden. Her don't crave vor vairs and dance-capers," muttered Old Will.

"Some keep 'em clean, some dirty. I like to see ours clean. This one is Mark's," said Annie. "It's an old custom for each one of the family to have a crook. We are very old-fashioned people, miss."

"'Tis time I wur going vore," said Will in his baffling dialect, hoping that Annie would take the hint and dismiss him.

"Where is your brother?" said Edith.

"He is in Fursdon to-day. He has been here."

"Come over on the plats," said Will. "I wur tearing a rock and never heard mun, and I got to spit on me hands and he tetched me and ses, 'Vaither, I'd be pleased if yew didn't work so hard.' I be seventy-five, mistress, but I don't want to sit to the window and watch they wheels go to and vro."

"You can go now, dad."

"Thank ye, my dear. If yew comes up through to the plats, mistress, I'll larn ye to tear they rocks"; and Old Will was off, almost running, so eager was he to reach the battlefield and ring his music until the evening voices told him it was time to stop.

"What is your brother doing in Fursdon?" Edith asked.

"Oh, the same thing," said Annie quietly. "He has got a

call—you wouldn't believe it, miss, but father understands that better than I do—and he will go on until it kills him."

"The people won't hurt him?"

"I think he will burn out, miss."

"He is not strong?"

"No, miss. 'Tis all the other way."

"He does not live with you?"

"Freezabeer is too much out of the way for him. He is with old Wreford up at the old 'pike, and they go through the country together, and in every village Mark has his little talk."

"How do they receive him?"

"Oh, there have been some rows, but nothing serious. Most of them are amused. The gentry are his enemies."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, miss, they call it cheek. They think Mark only does it to insult them."

"Do you know what his plans are?"

"I fancy he doesn't know himself. He says he has got five years. He must finish the work in five years, and when that time is up he must go. He won't tell us what he means, and he won't say what he has been doing the last four years. Learning, he says. But when the five years are up here he has a promise to keep, and he must go."

"Not die?"

"I don't know what he means."

There was a smile on Edith's face as she went away from Freezabeer. She was for action, she too meant to fight. The music of Old Will's jumper was sounding above, and she took it as the call to advance and do something; but what could she accomplish when confronted by the wall? Which was better, to climb and fail, or sit down and wait for the stones to crumble? Surely the road answered, that great white terrace cut out of the rock. The weak would have turned from that frowning hill, saying, "It is impossible to make a road there"; but the strong had climbed, lives had been lost, human strength had been worn out, and the road was there.

A young girl, poor and almost homeless, what could she do in the way of roadmaking? What of influence and sweet womanliness; throw these into the scale against the money-bags, and see how light the gold is. Endeavour is the lever which rolls the world over; labour, not money, had made the road. Those walls were built by labour, so was the universe made. Where in all the history of the world is the hero who scorned spadework?

"We will do something to-day," said Edith; and on she walked to Godbeer.

It was a rough place. The shaft of the old mine, filled with rubbish, was surrounded by huge granite blocks; a rotten fence encircled it, and behind the firs, beaten sideways by the gales, seemed to cling together for protection. It was a place of owls when the day left it.

Edith seated herself upon a rock, and presently Gerard passed, but without seeing her. His hat was off, and he placed his hand from time to time upon his forehead as if his head ached. He looked ill. Edith felt frightened and unhappy, did not call him, and presently watched him pass again looking down. She shook her head rather crossly, then with an impatient, "We mustn't be miserable," she picked up a little cone and threw it at him.

"Here I am. On the top of the granite."

Gerard's manner changed at once, and he was soon beside her on the sunny stone; but he was not the same hopeful creature, full of the strength of youth and the knowledge that the world was already half conquered, whom she had known. He had brought a trouble with him, and it sat beside them on the rock.

"I have a holiday," she said. "For six hours I am my own mistress. So you must laugh please, for there will be plenty of frowns later on."

"I was afraid you had not come," he said, always afraid of something, and looking away from her.

"I was watching you, and you were thinking about sermons."

"I was thinking about the name of this place, Godbeer. I don't like the sound of it."

"Beer is everywhere. I have just come from Freezabeer, and I shall go through all sorts of beer walking back," said Edith merrily.

"When people corrupt *by* into *beer* it suggests what they are thinking of."

"Well, you needn't think of it. I am not here for long, and I have got matters to discuss, dreadfully serious matters," said Edith frowning.

Gerard turned and tried to look at her. He saw a resolute little nose, the brim of a hat, and lower down a hand which did not contain a proper proportion of flesh, and the fingers of that hand were slightly roughened.

"Don't look at my boots, please. It always disconcerts people when you look at their boots. Yes, they are patched both behind and before. Oli and Eli have spent hours over them; and the last time they held a solemn inquest, each with spectacles on, so wise and serious, and the verdict was death from being trodden on. I should like to go and keep house for Eli and Oli, I should really, and I would make them so pluffy, as Will Yeo would say. Or I should like to go to crazy Freezabeer and bake in the cloam-oven, and sell hot saffron-cake to any one who liked to come and buy. There," said Edith, adding to herself, "now we are ready." Then she placed her hand on Gerard's arm and said in a pitiful voice, "Please tell me what is the matter."

Gerard looked up, closed his hand on hers, not as a lover, but like a drowning man, and said, "Edith."

"We are present," she said in the queenly plural.

"I have broken my vows."

"We all do," said she gently. "It is better to break than never to make. Tell me," she said gently, "what happened at Fingle Bridge?"

"Have you seen any difference?"

"You have been serious; I could see you were worrying.

You have been more reserved to me and more outspoken to others."

"I met Mark Yeo."

Edith's eyes began to shine, and she bent forward quickly. "Then you met a man. I know him; I can guess what he said—he wants you to join him."

"I told him I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I have my living——"

"Oh, never mind the eating if you can stop the drinking. Help him."

"You want me to?" he said wonderingly. "Think what it would mean: giving up my curacy, setting everyone against me, falling back again on my father, giving up you."

"I come rather low down," she murmured; and then decidedly, "That is nonsense. Drop me, put me out, you haven't got me yet. I am afraid, Gerard, you are not quite strong."

He did not reply to that.

"Think of old Yeo up there splitting the rocks. Doesn't it rouse you? Be a man," she whispered gently.

"I have been half asleep for a week," he answered after a pause.

"Since?"

"I dined with Vivian."

"Come along," she said, smiling. "It is nearly out."

"I drank," he muttered, but could say no more.

"He wanted you to?"

"He made me."

This was another confession of weakness, but there was an excuse, for the will of the squire was like a millstone crushing lesser things to powder.

"I don't quite understand Mr Vivian," said Edith presumptuously. As if such a young thing could understand an elementary force. "But I am sure, if he pressed you to drink a glass of wine, it was done out of sheer hospitality. I know

he is most kind. It is not in his nature to do harm to anyone. I shall never forget how good he was when I was ill, sending me fruit and flowers, and often coming over to inquire. I am certain he would be the last to wish you to break a vow."

Gerard listened with amazement. He, too, had presumed to understand Vivian, and had almost decided he was an enemy; and here was Edith suggesting he himself was at fault, and if the squire had erred, it was on the side of generosity. He could not complete the confession, mention his departure from Rose Ash, or as much as he could remember of it, the tragedy among the brambles, the horror of that night. If he had done so, it might have been better, but the whole truth would have made Edith shrink away from him for ever.

"Have you heard that he drinks too much?" Gerard ventured in a miserable voice.

"Never," said Edith warmly, little dreaming what a dangerous doctrine she was preaching. "I have never heard a word against Mr Vivian's character."

It was true; nobody ventured to speak that word.

"I believe he hates drunkenness. He has told me himself he intends getting some of the beer-houses closed."

It was true. Hosken had an interest in some of them, and these were the ones to be closed.

"He thinks Mark Yeo is a fine fellow, and he is going to help him."

"He said he would help me."

"He will," said Edith eagerly. "But you must be firm when you dine with him. He will like you all the better, because he is firm himself."

"He invited me to dine last Monday. I sent him a refusal, saying I was busy. It was not the truth," said Gerard, pulling at the moss upon the stone.

"Oh, you must not," cried Edith. "Don't you see you are standing in your own way? Mr Vivian can do so much for you."

For the first time since that horrible evening, it occurred to

Gerard that he had left the squire sober; asleep certainly, or feigning it, but none the worse for his liquor. He began to think Edith was right, that he might have impressed Vivian with the idea he really wanted to indulge in the various old liquors, and had only refused out of diffidence.

"You are angry with me," was all he could say.

"No, Gerard," she said. "Do look at me."

It was an unhappy face, lined with trouble, desiring to act, but afraid to strike; and beneath it the clerical garments looked out of place, suggesting that their wearer was a child who had dressed himself up for the sake of amusement, and would put the things off presently and go back to his lessons. There was something in those eyes which seemed to say, "I mean well; I have the desire to be good, but there is a beast inside me." Edith could not read that message, but Vivian had intercepted it. To play with the forces of good and evil was a merry game to the squire.

"Oh, but I can't look at you," said Edith, and though she spoke merrily, her face was serious.

Her moment had come. They were in a temple of unhewn rock, and the oratorio of labour was playing above, the hammer of Job Lithern answering the cantorial jumper of precentor Will.

"We can do something, Gerard. We," insisted Edith, hardly daring to think of the littleness of that we.

A light came into his face as he held her hands, as he had held those of Mark upon the bridge.

"Together?" he cried.

"I think so. Gerard, I should not mind," she murmured, becoming girlishly and heather-like pink. "We are so weak alone—we," said Edith again. "It is a strong word."

There was an enchantment in the place. It was the day-lily bursting into flower.

"Is this the answer, Edith?"

"It is—too soon?"

"No, no." Who could have dared to think it was too late? She had not promised before; had told him to wait a little,

lie upon the anvil awhile, because, though she knew her own heart, she doubted whether he could trust his; but seeing him thus miserable, she melted.

A pretty scene upon the granite—white children working out the problem of checkmating the red king vice—but it left no record on the rock. How could it leave a record elsewhere? They were only organisms struggling to escape from the bed of algæ, and the sea beyond looked grand, a power to be conquered with a cockleshell. How could they know that storms were not the danger, not the opposition of the sea, but its tranquil indifference? "It is nothing to me whether you sail upon me or not. I ignore you, for I am strong and you are weak. You have grown out of my ooze."

When Gerard reached home that evening, feeling like Goliath covered with armour, a youth awaited him with a sling and a smooth pebble from the brook. The sling was a note written in a large and curiously child-like hand, and the pebble was a parcel.

"I have sent you some of the old brandy, as you liked it so much. It will be good for your neuralgia, which you told me you suffered from. I hope it may inspire your tongue with eloquence, and your body with health. You must come and dine next week. It will be a great pleasure entertaining you."

Edith too was happy, although there were slings and smooth pebbles awaiting her. On her way back from the queerly named places she had visited—Freezabeer, which signified a cold home, though it was not, and Godbeer, which was intended to mean God's home, more happily named because it was a part of the moor—she entered a lonely lane, and here there was a wood of larches. A gate led into it from the lane, and over the gate a man was leaning, as if he was tired with running, and had stopped there to get his breath. It was Mark on his way to the old turnpike.

"I have been to Freezabeer asking about you," said Edith. "Annie told me I might see you. Now tell me, how are you getting on?"

Mark stood up straight, tired no longer. "Before I say anything else, let me thank you," he said. "That day I met you in the wood was the beginning of this life. You made the way clear. It is all clear now, up to the end."

"I did nothing," said Edith.

"I was a man looking into a dark cloud, trying to find a star. You pointed out the star. If I had not met you that day I might have been working now at Love Lane."

"You don't really know what is going to happen?" said Edith eagerly, for this sounded like mysticism, which is always attractive to young minds.

"I will explain in this way," said Mark. "When I was abroad I met a man who was a help to me. One evening I walked back with him from a meeting. He was going away the next day, and as we walked I saw the sign ahead. It was on a clump of trees where the road divided, and we were to part there. I knew then that something was going to happen, though I could not tell what; but I felt very miserable, and as we walked on I seemed to hear my companion saying, 'Last time,' though I did not fully realise it until afterwards. Before the week was over I heard he had died suddenly. The sign warns, it does not tell; but when the thing warned of has happened I know that it did tell, but somehow I have not been able to understand."

"What is this sign?"

"I used to think in my younger days it was something on the rocks. I still have that feeling, but I know now it proceeds from myself. It is there now. It stopped me."

"Where?" cried Edith.

Mark pointed into the wood. The sun was falling low, and all the straight columns of the larches stretched away into the golden light. It was a scene of exquisite softness after the slope of Godbeer; from the granite to the ferns, from hard reality to mysticism. No rocks were there; only soft waving things, and from the depth beyond came faintly the smell of reeds. A larch wood at sunset is dangerous to weak minds,

for to very few is it given to see a beautiful thing beautifully.

"Something sits there now."

"But what is it?"

"Perhaps my own cowardice."

"What is it like?"

"It has no shape. Sometimes it seems horrible."

"Can you go up to it?"

"I never reach it. I think sometimes I can almost put out my hand and touch it, and then I see it is just the same distance ahead."

"What is the end that you see?"

"Failure, miss."

"Don't believe that," she cried. "When a man does his best he must succeed. Think of your father. Would anyone believe it possible to remove rocks as he has done?"

"The sign tells me I can't succeed, for I haven't got the faith, miss; and when a man works without that he has no right hand."

"Don't believe that either," she said recklessly. "Why, I have got the faith."

"No, miss; I beg your pardon for contradicting, but you have not got it. You think you have. Go among the drunkards and speak to them. Go among the gentry and speak to them. You will have no faith left. You will work as I do, in despair, because you must."

"But you are doing something."

"What good has my father done? Those fields of his are worth nothing, although he has devoted his life to them. Nobody would give him more than a few shillings for the labour of more than sixty years. I may clear a field or two, but when I go the moor will take them back again. Do you know the Boones of Dry Arch, miss?"

"The dear old witch-woman, five feet high, who bows to the ground every time she sees me," cried Edith.

"You don't know the sort of life she leads. You don't

know why she stands at the door when you go to see her. It is to prevent you from entering and seeing what a home it is. Her son Joseph is one of the worst; he lives in a drugged state, the influence of drink is never off him, and when I talk to him I know that it is useless to try and reform the drunkard. He is a fat, red-faced, good-natured fellow, but you can't talk to him. He laughs, actually encourages you to go on, and when you are tired of talking asks you to come and have a drink with him."

Edith had been watching him closely, wondering, and then she said, "Where did you learn to speak like this?"

Mark hesitated, and some moments passed before he replied, "I have worked for myself during the last four years."

He stopped with difficulty, for there was so much more to be said, while Edith added, "You have got five years here. Annie told me."

"That's right, miss. I am on leave for five years, and when that time is up I go back to the place where I received my education. I am under a vow to return. Don't ask me any more," he pleaded, "or I shall have to tell you all."

"Why not?" she said.

"No, miss," he answered, turning to the gate. "You don't know what you ask."

It was the old story of man and woman, the story of sympathy. It is so hard for men and women to work together for the good of others, because the lives which were meant to be unselfish end at last in working for each other, and the common object gets dim; but Edith felt that of the two men, Gerard and Mark, there was one who would not break a vow; and he was not the man she was going to work with.

"I shall see you again," she said. "Or I shall hear about you from Mr Spiller."

"You gave me a word once before, miss," said Mark, looking down the golden wood. "Will you give me one now?"

"Strength," she murmured, and went on; while the man at the gate smiled and muttered bitterly, "I am weak."

It was late when Edith reached the square house and passed the stucco Venuses with the abandon of any one of them. She guessed there was going to be a scene, but didn't care, for she felt free, her blood was up; if she could help men she could defeat a woman. So she entered by the kitchen, whispered the cook to send her up something to eat, and went to her room by the back stairs, hearing a noise of laughter elsewhere. Young Luxmoore, a high-class Joseph Boone, had come back with the mistress, and they were merry, the one with whisky, the other with blood. With the accessories of civilisation removed they would have been a couple of savages. Education and the ologies had done very little for them. They obeyed the law to a certain extent, worshipped the gods of their country in dumb show, praised great men, and cast back to their primitive ancestry at every opportunity.

"I say, Dick, let's have some fun," cried Mrs Allen. She was always in a humorous mood after a day of slaughter. "Edith has come in, and it's no use telling her to come down, for she won't. She hates you like poison, my dear. We'll go up and visit her."

"Oh, but I can't do that, you know, go into her bedroom. Hang it all, Mrs Allen, I like the girl, and the servants would know. I should lose my reputation."

"I shall be with you. My dear boy, as if you had any reputation to lose."

Young Luxmoore sniggered feebly. He was pleased to think the suggestion was quite true. It had always been his object to be considered a good sportsman, and he had not failed.

"I'll chaperon you. Nobody will know."

"And if they do, she will have to marry me," said the young drunkard brilliantly. "I never thought of that. Upon my soul she will be so talked about she'll have to marry me."

It was a queer sort of devotion, flavoured with the essence

of unmorality, but it served. All that the young man wanted was a decent girl to play with when his god didn't want him.

"She always locks herself in," grumbled Mrs Allen. "Anyone would think she was afraid of me."

Edith's room was quite by itself at the end of a passage. When she heard a knock she started, although it was not unexpected; but she heard also a laugh, and answered, "I am going to bed, Mrs Allen. I am very tired."

"I want to speak to you."

"To-morrow will do."

"Open the door at once."

Edith obeyed, and her visitors entered, one of them unsteadily with the apology: "I say, Miss Edith, I hope you don't mind."

The girl looked very small, and the dark lines beneath her eyes became suddenly black; but she stood up straight, and said, "Will you go out of my room at once, Mr Luxmoore?" in a quiet, steady voice; and out he would have gone had not Mrs Allen caught him with a shrill scream of laughter and pushed him upon Edith's bed. Then she banged the door, turned the key, and drew it out.

"Let me go, Mrs Allen," said Edith fiercely.

"Don't be such an idiot. Can't you see we are only having a little fun?"

"A girl cannot afford fun like this."

"You are beastly sentimental. We are going to stay as long as we like. You mustn't go to sleep there, Dick," cried Mrs Allen, with another scream of laughter.

"Mr Luxmoore," said Edith in a low voice. "Please listen to me. I am a girl without father or mother, and without means, or I should not be here. My reputation may be nothing to you, but it is about all I have. I ask you to leave my room." Then she cried, "If you won't I shall get out of the window."

There was the right material in the young fellow: he would have been a good sort in the real sense if he had not been

spoilt; he was merely wasted, a sound piece of flesh gone to corruption.

"I will, Miss Edith, I will," he stammered. "I didn't mean to—I thought you would treat it as a joke. She doesn't like it, Mrs Allen. I wouldn't have come if I'd known. I swear it, Miss Edith." Then he began to mutter, "I'd murder anyone who insulted you."

"What's wrong, Dick?" shouted Mrs Allen, who was getting out of control and smelling blood again.

"Let me out, Mrs Allen. I'm going out. Damn it all, I will go out. She hasn't got a father or mother—and no money."

"This was her father," cried Mrs Allen, sweeping forward to a table which held Edith's small treasures, snatching up a frame, tearing out a photograph.

"It's the only one I have," cried Edith, coming forward.

"Do you hear what she says, Mrs Allen?" shouted young Luxmoore. "It's the only one she has."

Mrs Allen tore the thing into fragments, laughing hysterically.

Poor Edith steadied herself, but those lines beneath her eyes said something.

"Please open the window, Mr Luxmoore," she asked gently.

"I will, Miss Edith. By God!" muttered the weak creature, blundering across the room.

"No," screamed Mrs Allen, frightened at last. "Edith, I'm sorry. I lost my temper. Don't touch me, there's a good girl. It's—it's my wretched nerves. Come back, Dick. Edith is so—such a prude. Here is the key," she muttered. "Come away. Don't say anything. She's wild enough to murder us."

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT RENTS

THE rent of Love Lane Farm was paid half-yearly in the old-fashioned way; collected by those to whom tribute was due in person. It was the one appointment they never failed to keep, and the one they were not required to keep so far as Caleb Starke was concerned. Every year he found it harder to pay; poverty was increasing, the land was getting worn out, his pieces of money would not copulate. He said so, and the owners had to believe, though they would not spare him; and nobody knew of the disease which made him refer to the pieces of money darkly under the title of lambs and he-goats as if the words gold and silver were too dangerous for use.

Honest old Barseba had no time to think about poverty or riches; if her husband grumbled about the one, she at least was making for the other, always at work, seven days a week and no holidays, half the work of the farm and all the work of the house—Hercules himself would have tottered to see her—and she did the mending for the hind and preached a little gospel to him sometimes, and she cut the faggot-wood and did all the dairy work. She was famous for her butter, which she made in the slow old-fashioned way, churning the cream with her hands, turning it out in great amorphous masses, which were sent out to market, cut up by the trader, mixed with ninety per cent. of cheap foreign butter and sold to the public as best Devonshire after the manner of business. Barseba was a hyperphysical bee. She bred turkeys, geese, fowls, and ducks; she brought up the calves and orphaned

lambs; she made the cider without much assistance, turned out for the threshing, and in some miraculous way cooked a good dinner at the same time; she attended to the vegetable garden; she divided her physical self into a corps of personalities, appearing to toss hay in Stockey Furzen with one hand while with the other she made the beds in Love Lane. On the whole it was a wonderful life, and there was no reward, for she was only a woman, getting very white about the head. She was not a worker like a man, she only messed about the place; and one day she would take to her bed and the next she would die, because she had no time to be idle, and then perhaps Caleb would remember she had been "wonderful handy," and would remind the undertaker that it must be a very cheap funeral. If there was poverty it seemed hard upon Barseba. If there were coins to be spent for holiday-making it seemed unjust she should not have the use of them. But the chickens were waiting to be fed. There were rats to be trapped in the barn, or they would have the young turkeys. A calf was expected at any moment. There was no time to wonder where the money went.

Mark and Old Coles arrived first and were received by Barseba in the parlour, which was thrown open that day and was almost as hard to sweep out as a field upon Dartmoor, the floor being composed of black and ridged cobblestones, upon which the furniture shifted with telekinetic movements. It was a damp room, and no fire could warm it, still it was the place of state receptions; and, for the satisfaction of those who were to enter, albums of yellow photographs, proclaiming the record and testifying to the legitimate descent of the Starkes, had been pushed into prominence. The "drinkings" were in the cloam-oven, according to the law of hospitality, more food than drink in spite of the name, being for the most part hot cakes.

Mark would have come in any case to act as guardian to Old Coles, but it so happened that Caleb had ridden over to the old turnpike seeking his help, because a lot of gaps had been made in his hedges and the ewe-lambs were slipping out one after the other.

"Yew'm a stranger, Mark. Why ain't yew been over to see us avore?" said Barseba, doing different things with each hand and kicking the bits of wood left of the kindling upon the hearthstone to clear the floor.

"I have been busy, or I should have come long ago," said Mark.

"They ses plenty o' work be a gude thing," cried Barseba. "But it du keep a body untidy, and it du mak' white heads. Ain't I a proper old granny?" she asked, shaking the thin hair over her eyes.

"It keeps you from worrying," said Mark.

"True enough, my dear. If I wur to finish work one day I'd set me down and begin to think if I wur going right or wrong, and then I'd worry, for I'd be certain to fancy I wur going wrong."

"The old stag turkey is still alive, I see. He and I are old friends."

"Well, my dear, master wun't kill mun. Let 'en live as long as he've a mind to, he ses. He'm a contrairy old toad as ever wur, but he gets on well enough wi' the men. 'Tis the women he can't abide. Master ha' got a liking for 'en, but I ses let 'en lay an egg and then I'll believe in 'en."

The great bird was in front of the window, standing upon a dunghill, regarding the hens with an Augustinian eye. Sometimes he stirred and puffed a lamentation. He was ragged in appearance, and looked as if he had been dragging himself through brambles, rolling upon sharp stones, tearing out his feathers, still further to mortify the flesh. Not a creature in the whole world of the farmyard was his friend.

"Heard from Patience?" asked Mark, and Barseba's quiet blue eyes became troubled.

Not a day of Mark's life passed which did not include the thought of Patience, and the memory of his vow to help her, if she would let him. She was still a part of his life, on account of those former days.

"Her wrote to Tempy Christmas. 'I be doing first-rate,'

her said, but her don't write to me, and her never comes home," Barseba answered.

"You speak as if you were troubled about her."

"Aw, my dear, how fine yew du talk! I can't hardly believe yew ever worked here as a chap. I feels like saying sir to ye as I would to squire. 'Tis little wonder the chaps crave to get away across the seas if it larns 'em to talk so fine. They ses yew be a preacher, Mark, but I du hope yew b'ain't a Methody and a teetotaler. When yew gives me a Methody and a teetotaler, yew gives me a rascal," said Barseba.

"I am a teetotaler, but I don't boast of it," said Mark.

"If yew don't boast on't, I reckon yew means it, and if yew means it yew b'ain't a Methody. I went to the door one day, my dear, and there wur a little fellow not much bigger than the stag-turkey, and he fluffed out and ses, 'I ha' come all the way from Plymouth to preach the gospel to ye.' I ses to 'en, 'Then yew can get along back to Plymouth. Look ye here,' I ses, pointing to the Buke on the dresser, and there he be, Mark, and I don't set no cloam on him neither, 'there be more gospel in him,' I ses, 'than yew can preach to me, and if there be any more, I don't want to hear it.' Then he told me I wur a stiff-necked woman, and I picked up my scouring-pole, and he went across the court on they little bendy legs of his in dree ticks o' the old grandvaither."

"What about Patience?" asked Mark.

"Well, my dear, her sent Tempy a portrait, and her wur dressed better than a poor maid ought to be dressed."

"She was always fond of clothes," Mark muttered, but he remembered that Patience had been fond of other things as well: those things which promise to give a girl much, while they are taking everything from her.

"Master be calling vor ye," said Barseba, as a sharp voice sounded from the regions above.

Love Lane Farm was a rambling place, which the hand of the restorer had hardly touched since its erection in the

seventeenth century. The living-room opened on one side into a linhay which was part of the house, and had no doubt been once a parlour. It was then filled with roots, implements, and the cider-press. At one corner was a ladder, giving access by means of a trap-door to a barn which had been intended as a bedroom ; and this opened into a passage, which led to a long and narrow chamber used for generations as a lumber-room. Some moisture came through the roof, but the walls were still sound. The articles of furniture consisted of a table and oak-chest, both regarded as worthless by the Starkes, but possessing a certain value as genuine antiques ; books constituted the principal lumber in the place.

It was supposed that a real gentleman had occupied the house when it was first built, and these books had belonged to him, and upon his death had been thrown in confusion into the large chest at the end of his room, and they had been kicked about the place ever since, no educated person knowing of their existence, and none of the uneducated giving any attention to them, beyond burning one or two occasionally when fuel ran short. It was possible, of course, that books collected during the seventeenth century might have something more than a nominal value, but such an idea could never have occurred to Caleb, nor even to Mark, as they belonged to a class which attaches no value to books or pictures ; and though Mark had been educated, he was only able to judge books by the standard of those he had seen exposed for sale. Still, Caleb was fond of his books, which had been passed on from one tenant to another as fixtures, and he spent much of his time in the corner under the roof, trying to spell out strange sentences, and vaguely wondering if by so doing he might be acquiring the powers of witchcraft. It was strange to think that while the owners of the place were collecting outside, hungry for their few pounds of rent, a Shakespearian folio was stuffed into the wall to stop a rat-hole. These creatures had been kept under out of necessity, or none of the books would have escaped. As it was, most of

them had been gnawed, and some had lost their bindings altogether.

"Shut the trap down. Don't ye mak' more noise than yew can help," said Caleb. He was seated on two woolsacks beside the table, arranging money into little heaps; his face was frightened and his eyes were cunning. "Yew'm the only man I can trust, Mark. I wants yew to bide near me and watch I b'ain't robbed. I sleeps up here—ha' done vor the last year. I be fearful volks may come and steal the tetties."

He cast an anxious glance over his shoulder, and as Mark approached he picked up a sack and flung it towards a hole in the floor, but not quite over, so that Mark caught sight of a box sunk between the joists, and before the sack went into its proper place he got near enough to see that it was not full of "tetties."

"A queer place to keep potatoes," he said. "Not enough to steal, I fancy."

"Well, they b'ain't all tetties," said Caleb, with a foolish giggle. "Pots o' honey, Mark. I keeps the honey here as well."

That was true; and downstairs was the ever-working Barseba, who made the honey, but never tasted it.

"I wants yew to come and bide here, Mark," the miser went on. "I'll give ye dree gude meals a day, and yew shan't work more than yew ha' a mind to."

"I've got my work, thank ye, Mr Starke," said Mark.

"I'll pay yew. I'll give ye some tetties, proper fine tetties vull o' eyes."

"And honey?" asked Mark drily.

"Aw ees, a spuneful when yew craves vor't. But I ain't got any money, Mark; I can't spare the money. I'll give ye bukes and welcome, but there b'ain't no money."

"What's that on the table?"

"Why, 'tis the rent, Mark, half a year's rent vor Love Lane. I don't know how it got there, but when it ha' got to come, there it be. When yew'm pinched yew bleeds. Aw Mark, seventy golden pounds for a bid o' land what the Lord made

on a Monday free to all, vuzzy land as yew knows, and cursed wi' brimmles vor our sins."

"It's good soil," said Mark.

"It b'ain't. Yew can't du nought wi't. Yew digs up the heather and finds vern-roots, and when yew digs up the vern yew strikes granite. The Lord could ha' done better if He'd a mind to, but He said, 'I'll mak' 'em sweat.' I ha' sweated all my life, and now I be going down to the grave wi' nought but a few tetties."

"That's more than you brought into the world," said Mark gravely.

"That's right, more than I brought in wi' me. Yew puts it plain, Mark. They ses yew'm a preacher. Du ye bide wi' me, Mark," said Caleb plaintively. "I gets mazed, I tell ye, when I thinks of the moths and worms trying to get to my tetties. I don't keep 'em in paper vor dread o' the rats, and I hides 'em under the sack so as 'em shan't get mildewy. There be a lot o' thieves in Fursdon, I knows there be, and last night I saw a man behind the hedge wi' a gun."

"After rabbits," said Mark.

"He wur after my tetties. I sleeps on the trap," said the cunning old fellow. "They can't get in till they ha' pushed me off."

Mark seated himself among the books and began to turn them over indifferently, asking who they belonged to.

"They goes wi' the house. They'm only a lot of old trade," said Caleb contemptuously. "I'd sell the lot vor a shillun. I tears one of 'em abroad when I wants a light. There be some vunny little pictures in him," he said, kicking an illuminated missal across the floor.

Mark picked up a shabby little volume and opened it. His foot rested upon a horn-book ornamented with the usual Criss Cross Row and set in an engraved frame, its back chased with flowers. At his side was a stiff manuscript stitched roughly into boards, and this was entitled in the nervous handwriting of three hundred years ago, "A true and particular Account

of ye History of ye Countie of Devon frō the Accession of King Henry VIII to ye present Time to which be added an Account of ye Tinners and Savages vpon ye Forest of Dertymore and a History of ye Mines therof." There was no date. The work had been written by the scholarly recluse who had collected the books; and there it was kicked about the barn, full of information unknown to the historian, waiting to be discovered.

"I should like this little book," said Mark, referring to the one he was holding. It was the first edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published at eighteen-pence.

"Put 'en in your pocket. Yew'm welcome," said Caleb. "Here be a vunny one about vishes," he went on, digging out *The Compleat Angler*. "He'm no gude, vor I ha' [tored 'en abroad. There be a lot o' church bukes," he said, pointing to a heap of ordinals. "Proper lot of old rubbish, b'ain't 'em?"

"May you give them away?" asked Mark.

"Well, 'em b'ain't rightly mine," said Caleb; "but nobody wants 'em. They belongs to the volk outside, and if 'em likes to tak' 'em away 'em can. Tak' two, Mark. The vunny words in 'em will mak' ye laugh, and yew can throw 'em away when yew ha' looked through 'em," he said, picking up the history in manuscript and handing it over. It was easy, he thought, to bribe Mark with rubbish. "Now yew looks like a scholar," he said grinning. "A proper schule-master yew be. If yew wur to come and bide wi' me I'd give ye all they bukes, and welcome."

Eminent men might have jumped at this offer, but Mark declined. He might have consented had Caleb offered him fifty pounds, as he required money badly; but a heap of old paper was not tempting.

Barseba was calling below, and Mark from the window could see the congregation of owners assembled in the court. Caleb wrapped the separate sums of money in scraps of paper torn from the handiest volume, which was a book very vilely printed by one Caxton, and then they clambered down. The trap-door was padlocked for fear of potato-stealers, and Caleb passed

into the court to shake hands with the Rescorlas, the Vids, Old Coles, and Judy Boone, and to mention he was not glad to see them.

Eli and Oli were munching cake like schoolboys, smiling at each other, full of fun because pay-day meant a holiday for them, more travelling, greater experiences, and a good laugh to end up with. Out of Oli's pocket peeped a kitten born of Ted, and reprieved from the bucket by reason of an "artful face." In the midst straddled George Vid, more magnificent than turkeys, and Maria accompanied him, larger even than her husband, but slovenly and down at heels. Better off than many of their neighbours, they had no idea of thrift; when Eli and Oli received five pounds they put away three, but when the Vids received five they spent ten. And when Judy Boone received her money it was cast to the lions, red, green and rampant, by her bloated son Joseph. Judy and Old Coles were together in the background, looking like antique china figures, but the old woman was the strongest. She did not shiver; she stood squarely, almost as broad as she was high, and she reverenced every man with an odd curtsey. Her best dress would hardly have tempted the ragpicker—the omnivorous Joseph devoured everything, clothes, furniture; he had mastered the science of reducing all things to a liquid, even his soul. Her ancient sun-bonnet had once surrounded a happier face, and now it was a network of lines, a maze of crows' feet, resembling a map of roads and lanes, ways of the dolorous. There were wayside crosses and small chapels upon that face.

"Ah, Mr Yeo!" cried the all-glorious George. "A very good-day to you. It does me good to shake you by the hand."

Mark surrendered, knowing the man, while Vid worked at his arm as if it had been the handle of the village pump.

"The country is talking of you, Mr Yeo. Yours is a sacred mission, and you have my prayers. I trust you will allow me to supply you with soap and candles. Cleanliness is next to godliness, as you know so well, and light is necessary for the eyes. Both articles are at the present time moderate in price.

I have supplied Mr Wreford these many years, and he knows me well—a man of words, just to a fault, expecting to receive his dues and rendering them in their season. Mother, come and shake Mr Yeo by the hand. Mother and I are both hearty, thank God."

Oli winked at Eli, and the little brother nodded and performed a pantomime of putting someone on his back with his head bumping against the stones.

"Ah, Mr Starke," cried Vid, worrying old Caleb's hand and arm. "The changing years, revolving, I think, is the word used in poetry, the change of seasons, seed-time and harvest, bring us together, the one to give, the other to receive. My cart is outside; soap and candles are at your very door and shall be placed upon your threshold at the word. I am thankful for these days which bring the fruit of industry, the reward of toil. They bring a blessing to all concerned, and there is no ill-feeling—thank God!—a blessing to you, Mr Starke, inasmuch as you know you have received the fruits of the earth in their season, and a blessing to us, the payees—I think that is the word used by the lawyers—if we use the money which is our due in the right way. Mother, Mr Starke is craving to take you by the hand."

Caleb was doing no such thing. He was worrying with the little parcels of money and trying to find words to express his poverty, and to explain that upon this occasion he was too embarrassed to pay.

"Have you any objections to my taking these books?" said Mark, addressing the company in general, and exhibiting the two volumes which would have bought up Love Lane and bestowed an endowment upon it also.

No one had the slightest objection except Vid. He knew all about the pile of rubbish in the barn, as he had poked about the place many a time, to satisfy himself that the tenant was doing no wilful damage, and he had expressed the opinion that it might be possible to get rid of the books for a few shillings to some ragman such as his old friend, Mr Wreford.

He adjusted his spectacles, put on his parish council manner —he was talker-in-chief to that body, and his business was to throw apples of discord about the place—and said, "I am very much afraid, Mr Yeo, you cannot take them, and Mr Starke has no power to give them."

"They'm worth nought," muttered Caleb, as if Vid might have known he would not give away anything of value.

"It is a matter of principle. We must do our duty," said Vid, almost snatching the books from Mark. "I very much doubt whether we have power to part with them. It is depreciating the property, and we are its guardians."

"I be willing Mark should have them," said both the Rescorlas; but Vid would not hearken, although his face beamed with friendliness to all men. He declared the books must be restored to the barn, and then he pushed them into the pockets of his big brown coat, where they became forgotten because they were not silver and gold, but only those little bits of refuse which accumulate about old buildings.

The party went under cover, and, seated in the damp religious gloom of the state apartment, munched hot cakes until Caleb shuffled in, closed the door, and directed Mark to stand against it lest any robbers should burst in suddenly. Paying out was a grievous business. Those little parcels of money were pieces of paradise broken off like granite chips from the rock of his salvation. He handed them over one by one, and soon there was an outcry.

"A slight financial error, Mr Starke," boomed Vid. "I am ten shillings short. Mother, count your money. Among old friends, Mr Starke, it should not be necessary to count." Then he went over the coins again, rubbing and biting each one; while Maria, who had not sat at her husband's feet in vain, deftly passed him a sovereign and announced that she, too, had discovered a deficit.

"We must do our duty," said Vid in his masterful way. "You must put down thirty shillings, Mr Starke. Mother and me live with difficulty."

"I counted the money again and again," whined Caleb. He had been convicted before of giving short measure, not out of actual dishonesty, but because each departing coin seemed to fly away with his vitals. Misers are always cheated because they are over-careful. Had Caleb paid by cheque he would have been safe, but he distrusted paper and banks; rats devoured the one, and rascals shattered the other. "Mark Yeo counted the money, and he'm a scholar," he added miserably; but Mark shook his head when the appeal reached him.

"A slight mental error, Mr Starke," cried the noisy Vid. "Mr Yeo—and I am glad of the opportunity of mentioning that we are proud of Mr Yeo—disclaims having counted the money. He may do so now. Mother, spread your money upon the table. Now, Mr Yeo."

"It b'ain't thirty shilluns, Mark," whispered Caleb.

"It is," came the answer, and the old man knew he had been bitten.

"It wur only ten," he muttered.

"Mr Starke, we have been boys together. Do you admit trying to cheat me and poor dear mother of ten shillings, ten sordid pieces of silver?" cried Vid.

"No, George. I drapped half a sovereign, and he rolled down among the tetties," lied the poor old man.

"Thirty shillings," shouted Vid, then added, "This is only duty. There must be no ill-feeling."

"I be ruined, I be bankrupt, and the land be worth nought," pleaded Caleb, shuffling away from the big white-headed figure.

"Thirty shillings," boomed Vid. "Do not get angry, mother dear. This is business which is always painful, and we shall depart from Mr Starke, our old friend, with the hand-shake of peace and love."

"I counted the money a hundred times. If I ha' given yew tu little I ha' given t'others tu much," declared Caleb.

This did not appear upon investigation. Old Coles was undoubtedly short, but did not know of it until Mark informed him. He was, indeed, quite prepared to hear he had received

too much. Judy Boone was in a like case, but the old soul was hungry, and enjoying the drinkings so much that she couldn't bother about money which would be of no benefit to her. The Rescorlas, however, had received their full amount, and were then busily engaged in the long and laborious process of scrawling receipts. Folks stood in some awe of Eli and Oli, which seemed strange, as they were kind and gentle creatures; but then they were giants, they wrestled, their muscles stood out, and the only thing which frightens bullies is physical strength. George Vid kept himself apart from the Rescorlas. He never supplied them with soap and candles, nor did he express any desire to shake them by the hand.

Caleb pressed behind Mark, disappeared, and Barseba was offered up in his stead. She managed to save a little, and this fund was continually being exhausted, because Caleb guessed its existence. She produced her purse, paid out what was required, and had just enough with a few coppers over. "Us can't carry it away wi' us," she said cheerfully, then went back to the butter-making. Neither Caleb nor the stag-turkey could be found. Perhaps they had gone away together to hide in the field of granite.

Mark had a duty which was also the pleasure of visiting Temperance Mosscrop, whose face he had not seen since her marriage. Had he remained in the parish during those past four years he might still have not seen her unless he had called at Blue Violet, or had caught her waiting one Saturday evening at the gate of Broadview, where lived the farmer who employed Timothy as shepherd. Wages were paid on Saturday evening, and the men were also served with cider, as much as they wanted, and for an hour or two stood in the court, or in the barn if the skies were cold and wet, drinking, while those wives who were not independent waited at the gate of the court, which they were not supposed to enter, holding the market basket to be filled with supplies for the forthcoming week, when their masters liked to come forth and supply the funds. Mark would not have seen Temperance, because, when not

waiting at the gate of Broadview, she was at home, walking between the wood-stack and the cottage, from the pump to the door, to the linhay and back to the living-room. There was nothing to take her out. It is the sad part of village life that there is nothing to take the women out. The man has his roaring lion, where it is not proper for the wife to be seen. She would lose her reputation if she entered such a den, but his does not suffer whatever his condition when the lion has done with him. The young girl could flaunt about in fine colours, but the young married woman must not venture beyond the wood-stack—there is generally a voice from the cradle to call her back—but sometimes she enjoys a conversation with some passing neighbour at the gate, though there is little to discuss. Even if their country is at war they know hardly anything about it, except that some young fellows are not likely to be seen there any more. Almost the only topic is the evil done by neighbours, the evil done by the gentry; somehow there is never any good.

There had been a cluster of cottages at Blue Violet, but only one remained, which had been bought by the squire, a kindly act to save it from sharing the fate of the others. These ruins could be seen covered with brambles on both sides of the lane. It was a quiet place; no stranger walked that way, for the path was rough; carts struggled along it somehow going to Love Lane or nowhere. It was full of stones, dark, thorn-haunted, and in autumn there was the sour smell of apples along it. The moor heaved opposite, and a tor cast its shadow across the white walls, the shadow of a monster without form; and the traffic of the road could be heard sometimes and the roar of the mine always.

It was a good place to hide. That was the thought suggested to Mark. Not very far away was another cottage, occupied by a strange creature said to be a gentleman, a hermit without religion or love for anything not dumb, and he dwelt like a gasteropod, hiding his face, trying to hide his home, hurrying to shelter when he saw a real man. It was a wild kind of

happiness to be in the world and not of it, and to talk with the shadows which crept in purple off the moor; but it was sinking; it was going down into the docks and nettles, breeding stings and large unhealthy roots. Mark turned his face from the place where the shadows came from, heard the road and mine, and knew as those noises reached him which was the way.

A child was playing upon the stones, dragging an old tin kettle tied to a string, making a strange din that it might be kept quiet; a child with straw-coloured hair and hot, red face, old enough to walk but not to talk. Mark held out his hand, and called in his grave way, but the child went on rattling its kettle upon the stones, making noises only to be comprehended by women. Mark would have passed, but he had to stand and consider that hair and hot face, because it seemed to him that when he had been a small boy that same baby had toddled at his side.

"Mark," said a voice sharply and shortly, without the singing sound as if the voice was tired and broken, and a woman came across with a large faggot upon her shoulders. She swung round, dropped it, held out her hand. What a pretty girl Temperance had been, slim, soft-handed, and those fine dark eyes had drawn hearts to her four years ago. Here was a haggard woman, with a gaunt face, its bones protruding, and she had hardly any teeth, and the eyes were tired and as dull as burnt-out fires. It was a man's hand in his, rough and hard, larger than his own, and Mark noticed that this woman had no waist, a ragged old skirt surrounded her, her feet were thrust into great unfastened boots which had not been made for a woman. It was as if God had cursed this woman, and her beauty had withered away.

The faggot she had brought from the stack was composed of that vicious stuff blackthorn. It had crowned her forehead, and marked it with red scratches, that and other faggots. A woman's work, this fetching and carrying; the lowest and dirtiest—that is woman's work.

"Please to come inside, Mark."

"Four years, Temperance," he said; and she replied, "It ha' been a long four years."

They entered. The room was clean, the cloam gleamed brightly upon the dresser, the single crook was polished. No negligence there; only the girl Temperance had vanished, and this hard-faced woman had come in her stead. They stood and talked, while the child outside with the face of those early days dragged the battered kettle to and fro.

"She the only one?" asked Mark.

"Her b'ain't mine," Temperance answered. "I ha' none." She seemed afraid of Mark, to have a struggle to answer him. She knew he was learned and could speak; and perhaps she wanted to ask if there was any earthly paradise known to him where a tired, childless woman, still so young, could rest. Four years had shaken the beauty from her. What would four times four do? She would not be old even then; but with the curse upon her what would be left of the gift? Temperance had an imagination. She had told her schoolmates once stories about witches and enchanted castles which opened their mouths and made their eyes round. It was an unhappy gift possessed by few of her class. They did not know when they were badly used. She did, without complaining.

"That child," said Mark impatiently, when she hesitated; and Temperance went on, "I got a letter. It wur from a girl, and her said, 'Will ye tak' my child, and I'll pay two shillings a week?'"

She turned and drew the shabby curtains hung upon a piece of string. The sun was powerful and was streaming into the room. Something else came too, and it rested in the corner, and Mark saw it and knew why it was there. It was the truth, and it had come to be an interpreter.

"Has the money been paid?" he asked.

"Vor a year and a half. Then it stopped. The volks said, send 'en to the workhouse, but I kept 'en."

Mark looked at her, and she met his eyes proudly, and did not give way, but he could tell how much she knew.

"Did you recognise the handwriting?" he went on, knowing it was not an uncommon thing for girls who had gone wrong to write to strangers to take their children for a pittance.

"No," she answered.

"Whose child is she?"

"How be I to tell?"

"My sister's," said the interpreter.

"Who does she remind you of?"

"No one I can call to mind."

"My sister," said the interpreter.

"Temperance," said Mark gently, "is there anything you would like me to do?"

"Nought that I knows of," said the woman, but she had to lower her eyes.

"Go into the streets," said the interpreter.

"What be yew looking vor?" she said coldly.

"Your answers."

Temperance moved across the floor saying, "I ha' my work. Yew'd best go, Mark Yeo."

"I have made you angry?"

"Not that," she said. "Us be the like."

Mark knew what she meant. She was afraid of breaking down; but he did not go, he wanted to learn more, so he said, "I have not seen you since your marriage. I should not have known you if we had met in the village." Then to force her he added, "You had such fine teeth, Temperance. I should have known you by them, but now you have lost them."

"'Tis the hard watter," she said.

"Timothy," said the other thing.

"There b'ain't no money vor new ones," she said in the same indifferent voice.

"Where does the money go, Temperance?" he asked, thinking at last to draw her out.

"Food," she muttered.

"Drink," said the interpreter.

CHAPTER X

ABOUT A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

WHEN Eli and Oli left Love Lane, like boys with pocket-money, they walked apart with a certain histrionic grimness, casting suspicious glances at each other. Oli would not have been surprised, knowing the state of his brother's character, if Eli had taken to his heels; while Eli, fully aware that the junior partner was little better than a knave sometimes, was prepared to find, when he reached the cottage, that Oli was not following. The little brothers were jealous upon rent day.

The spirit of rivalry seemed to infect the whole garden. Squads of lupins and carnations seemed preparing to attack thin red lines of scarlet-runners and onions in Lincoln green. Tom scratched derisively in the celery trench, announcing his intention of departing with the master, of travelling into untrodden lands, and founding a seraglio in Somersetshire; while Ted tore up all the treaties, trespassed upon the pansies, and sneered openly. Even the bees hummed a war-march and decided upon a general massacre of drones at sunrise.

The young brothers were as secret as shell-fish. Each knew what the other intended, though he professed ignorance. It was a time when words had to be chosen carefully, and in the meantime they came home and walked up the garden path processionally in this order: a choir of bees chanting a hymn to liberty, then Tom, with tail erect as vexillum, purring salvos and vivas, followed by King Eli smiling despotically; afterwards Ted, with two kitten-acolytes leaping and dancing, preceding at their own risk President Oli, chuckling demo-

cratically. They passed in at the porch, and the breeze flung behind them curled petals from the roses and poppies. The ceremony of the exodus had commenced.

Eli brought forth a pair of boots and placed them on the stool with professional gravity. Better boots could have been gathered from the wayside, but, shocking as they were, the owner had left them with the brotherhood. They were like boats which had been driven upon the Manacles, and yet the brothers would not condemn them.

"Some new soles," said Eli.

"And new uppers," added Oli.

Then they would be like new again.

"Be yew agwaine to work to-morrow?" asked Oli sternly, as if rebuking his brother for having consecrated his life to the god of indolence.

Eli struggled with his features, and, having brought them under subjection, answered, "I ha' got half a mind to go to the bottoms and dig verns."

This belonged to the cryptic order of sayings. Had the brothers been like other men it would have been a falsehood, but constructed as they were they could not lie. They were too simple.

"Be yew coming along wi' me?" he added, smiling like a sun of heraldry.

"How about they old butes?" demanded Oli.

"Let 'en bide," said Eli.

There was a silence, badly broken by diplomatic chuckles; and then Oli remarked boldly, "I b'ain't agwaine to work to-morrow."

"Be yew agwaine to dig?"

"I ha' a mind to tak' a walk," came the defiant answer.

"Don't ye get tu fur and get tired, my dear."

"When I comes home I'll show ye how tired I be," Oli threatened; but the little brother answered serenely, "Yew couldn't put me down on my back no more than yew could turn they old butes into pixy-slippers."

The atmosphere of suspicion increased. Both children became restless, and presently Eli wandered into the garden. It was always thus on rent-day. Oli was predominant so far, and he was not going to be beaten without a struggle. Eli had been to Tavistock, but Oli beat him by reaching Plymouth. Eli passed across the Tamar, and Oli was compelled to press forward by forced marches into the sandy wastes of Wadebridge. Eli had threatened to besiege London, and Oli had promised in that case to penetrate into such outlying parts of the British Empire as Essex or Kent. If Eli went to the moon, Oli would go to Mars; and if Eli entered Mars, Oli would still defeat him; for he would die when the time came and travel still further; and if Eli died too, as was indeed not improbable, Oli would have to be born again into some other universe.

When two simple-minded creatures live together they find it very hard to deceive each other, and they generally end by doing the same thing, because their minds are so entangled that every idea is held in common, and what the one believes is his own proposal may really have been originated by the other. Thus it often happened that what Eli planned Oli accomplished.

Eli wandered into the portion of garden set apart for fruit, which was neutral ground. He had no jurisdiction over the vegetable patch, and to walk there would have been an unfriendly act. The currant-bushes were loaded with fruit of a seductive order. Eli looked upon them, smelt that they were good, black also, and ripe; there is a fascination in black currants.

Presently he returned to the cottage, and remarked, "Them old blackbirds be vair stripping the currant-bushes, my dear."

Oli was consulting an atlas which made the region of Dartmoor shamefully infinitesimal. The number of towns and villages still to be visited between Fursdon and the ends of the earth seemed very great, but there was quite an unnecessary amount of water, to say nothing of space, for there was also a

fine map of the moon, which was a wonder to Oli. He was gazing at it then with doubtful eyes, as if he suspected a certain amount of humour in science. He heard Eli's statement, but it was a long way between currant-bushes and lunar volcanoes, and he had to descend gradually.

"My dear," he said solemnly, "there be horses in the mune."

This appeared to be a discovery, and, as it was of greater interest to Eli for the moment than blackbirds in the garden, he asked for evidence.

"If there be mares there be horses, and there be mares in the mune," replied his young brother. "Here 'em be all over the place—Mare Imbrium, Mare Vaporum, stables of 'em everywhere. What I wants to know is, how did 'em find out?"

"Wi' telescopes," explained Eli. "Volks be got so wonderful clever that 'em knows more about the stars than the next street. They ses there be wheals in some of 'em. I read a bit about that on the newspaper."

"Tell ye what 'tis," said Oli. "Us don't know half what's been going on wi' these telegraphs and balloons. Some of 'em ha' got to the mune, vor certain."

"He be tu fur, and he'm always moving one way or t'other. 'Twould be as hard to reach the mune as to catch a little pig in a forty-acre field."

"Then how did 'em find out the names of all these places?" Oli demanded. "Here 'em be on the map, hundreds o' names. Here be the distance to the mune from the earth. How du 'em know how many miles it be, if 'em ain't been and measured it?"

"They guesses, I reckon," said Eli.

"They ha' no right to guess. 'Tis treating geography like religion. I ain't got no faith in maps," said Oli. "Look here, will ye? They ain't never heard o' Fursdon, or Rose Ash, or Blue Violet. They don't know of half the places us could tell 'em about, and yet 'em ses they knows the names of places in the mune. There be an old saying, my dear," con-

cluded Oli solemnly, "'Tis volly to be wise.' I be almost afeard 'tis true." Then he closed the atlas, returned to earth, and took an interest in currant-bushes.

"I ain't seen any blackbirds in the garden. Ted ha' druve they all out," he said.

Each brother defended his own cat. Tom did that which was evil in the sight of Oli, while Ted accomplished good works. Each cat received praise for every mouse found dead, and both were blamed for footprints in a seed-bed.

"The garden be vull o' birds, and they'm taking all the currants," mentioned Eli; and then he went out again, because Tom was licking his lips ostentatiously. There was a strain of vulgarity in Tom.

Oli followed secretly, hiding behind peas and scarlet-runners, and so approaching the fruit garden. His little brother was standing beside a currant-bush, his tongue denouncing fowls of the air, his arm rising and falling mechanically. From each little bunch he plucked the ripest berry, which was enjoyed and set to the credit of the blackbirds, and when every bunch had been decimated he passed on to the next bush.

Oli stood upright shouting, while Eli looked foolish, but he retained enough presence of mind to explain that the currants were so crowded it was necessary to thin them.

"Proper old blackbird!" cried Oli. "Yew wants a long winter to mak' yew tame, and that there old Tom, her b'ain't no better than yew be."

There came into the garden the sound of a clock striking, and it was Oli's turn to look foolish, for with its last stroke the clock lied, and the lie seemed to be published on the dial of Oli's face, and Eli noticed it, but said nothing. Oli had set the hands on one hour, to throw his brother into confusion.

"If it be seven," said Eli mockingly, "'tis supper-time."

"Ees, I reckon," said Oli, and then they both chuckled.

That night Oli listened, his soul stricken with guilt, and heard excursions. Eli was descending the stairs delicately, after the manner of an elephant treading on egg-shells, making

the cottage shake, and muttering, "Scat they old boards vor creaking." Then he slipped down a stair and caused a vibration which reached into the garden and troubled the distant bee-hives, where the drones were enjoying their last sleep. He trod also upon the tail of Ted, who came to investigate, and she announced the fact operatically. Finally he reached the clock, set the hands back two hours, and retreated with another earthquake, smiling to think that Oli was defeated.

Soon there was a noise outside his door, and Oli called, "Du ye hear anything, my dear?"

"I hears yew," said Eli crossly. "Why don't ye get to bed and sleep like an honest gentleman?"

"How be I to sleep when there be volk tumbling up the stairs and tramping round the garden?"

"I don't hear no one," said Eli. "Mebbe 'twur old Ted yowling."

"Mebbe 'tis that gurt blackbird after the currants," replied Oli. "I be agwaine down to see."

All this was sheer cunning, for Oli guessed what his brother had been up to, and knew he could not descend the stairs without shaking the earth. Eli remained in a kind of misery, wondering what Oli was doing to the clock, but he waited patiently until the cottage was in silence, then began to count a long row of boots waiting to be mended. "I'll count five hundred pairs avore I asks my young brother if he be asleep." But this was a fatal thing to do, for before he had counted three hundred pairs he was himself fast asleep.

So was the clock. It resented being interfered with, or, being perhaps an honest creature, it declined to be a party to such treachery, or, having possibly a sense of humour—and a grandfather clock is nothing if not sardonic—it decided to take its share in the game; and accordingly it ceased to work.

The first drone was just being dragged out of his cell when the first brother descended. It was the malevolent Oli, and he exchanged blank glances with the clock. The first thing to be done was to set it going and make it record some impos-

sible time. Then he kindled the sticks, made some tea, listening the whole time, while Eli was listening too, but keeping out of the way until his perfidious brother had departed. This happened shortly afterwards. Oli hurried off, together with one or two escaping drones like political fugitives, and then Eli came down and wondered what the time was. It was obviously early, as the sun was in a haze and the grass was white with dew.

A railway station, early in the morning, looks like a giant under opium. Not a door was even yawning when Oli reached the place after a five-mile tramp. He waited, and presently saw the big figure of Eli coming up the steep pathway in a great hurry. There was nothing for it but to hide, so he went into the shunting-yard and stood behind a truck, while Eli ascended and took possession of the platform, observing to a porter that business seemed slack that day.

"First train seven o'clock," said the man.

"I be agwaine to the pony-vair," announced Eli.

"T'other platform for Lydford," said the porter.

There was still an hour to wait, so Eli explored and made a disquieting discovery. He saw a pair of legs which terminated in boots dreadfully familiar and partly the work of his own hands. Eli recognised people by their boots. So Oli was there after all planning some excursion to antipodean deserts and "mares" afar. They remained, these ridiculous children, the one upon the platform, the other behind the truck, each believing himself invisible to the other. Oli could see Eli's hat, Eli could see Oli's boots; and both were hard at work scheming how to make the other lose the train.

The game appeared to be in Eli's hands, as he commanded the platform and all the approaches to the booking-office; but he did not intend to run any risks, so he placed himself by the door through which Oli would have to pass before he could take a ticket, and there he stood watching those inanimate boots until the train arrived in a sudden and unexpected manner, and complicated the position, because Eli had no

ticket, was on the wrong platform, and dared not move while those boots were visible. The train however hid them. Eli hurried to the pigeon-hole, grinned at the clerk, and said, "Ticket, if yew please."

"Where to?"

"I ha' done my young brother," said Eli exultantly. "I ha' kept 'en from getting a ticket. Come outside, will ye, and I'll show yew his butes."

"Where do you want to go? Hurry up," said the clerk.

"I'll just have a ticket," said Eli.

"Where to? You'll lose the train."

Eli found his mind a blank. He was so excited at having got the better of his brother, and so flustered at the idea of losing the train himself, that he forgot all about Lydford and the pony-fair.

"Give me a map, and I'll show ye," he gasped; but the clerk only laughed and told him he ought to have written it down.

"The mune," muttered Eli. "Horses, mares, ponies, vairs —Lydford," he cried.

"Too late," said the clerk. "Next train, eight-thirty."

Eli tumbled out on the platform. The train was gliding out, and there were neither legs nor boots nor any sign of corporeal Oli; but sticking out of one of the carriage windows was a hat, quite as familiar as those things of the other end, and still more retiring.

"The butes!" cried Eli, trying to persuade himself that hat was a double. "Where be 'em to?"

The stationmaster inquired what was wrong, but could gather nothing except that the big man with the child-like face had misplaced his foot-gear. "You have 'em on," he said.

"The butes beyond. My little brother wur in 'em," he cried.

"Your little brother has gone off in the train. I got his ticket for him," said a porter who knew the queer brothers.

Eli was shattered. He returned to the booking-office, made

sure of his ticket, and was much gratified by the arrival of another train, which he entered without asking questions; nor did he discover until motion began that, to use his expression, "the engine was at the wrong end." To travel in the contrary direction to that intended was however no unusual matter, and Eli was soon resigned and decided to get out at the first station.

When that station was reached Eli made another discovery, for the train added considerably to the romance of travelling by passing through at fifty miles an hour. A second station was treated in the same fashion, and then an official came down the corridor and asked Eli whither he was journeying. Eli replied he hadn't the least idea, but he had no grievance.

"Where's your ticket?"

"In my left bute." Eli was not used to officials who patrolled the train, and he had an idea this fellow might not be honest, while the official saw that he was dealing with a queer character. "Let's see your ticket," he said.

"Be yew the gentleman what throws coals inside the engine?" asked Eli, bending down and unlacing his boot.

The man's dignity gave way, for Eli had a very pleasant way of speaking, and he laughed as he looked at the ticket, and said, "You're in the wrong train, father."

"He be a gude one to go," said Eli. "Us went through that station wi' just two bangs and a whistle. I could sit in him all day," he said happily.

"We stop at Exeter. You had better get out there and see the stationmaster."

But the train was fated to stop before reaching Exeter. Signals were against it, brakes fell upon the wheels, and the train drew up at a small station. Eli got out, with a confused feeling that the Cathedral city had changed a good deal lately, and was at once approached by a gesticulating porter calling to him, "Get back."

"Why should I get back, if I ha' half a mind to get out?" demanded Eli.

"The train don't stop here," cried the porter.

"Aw, my dear soul! Look to mun, will ye?"

Eli explained matters, delivered up his ticket, and was presently allowed to depart and enjoy himself. Something was going on in the neighbouring village, which for the purpose of Eli's narrative was a great distance from his birth-place. There were tents and flags, torture was being inflicted by a local band, there were men with rosettes in their button-holes and a shining light of importance upon their faces, and polychromatic ladies out for plunder. Eli brightened up considerably, and asked a bystander if all this might mean a pony-fair.

Much to his amazement the man touched his hat, answered, "'Tis the feet, sir," and then hurried away to tell all he met that a distinguished stranger had just arrived by special train, or at least the London express had been especially stopped for him.

Eli asked some more questions, which were answered with reverence. It appeared that the parish church was going to tumble down, therefore a bazaar was being held for purposes of restoration, which meant destruction, but, as the building was a good type of ancient architecture, the promoters did not say so. In the tents all sorts of unholy traffic was taking place: a lady was telling fortunes by palmistry, lotteries were being held, gambling was in full swing; the law of the land was being broken in all directions, but as every penny was to be devoted to the cause of religion no harm was done. It was not easy to move without paying for the privilege, and shillings had to be produced before it was permissible even to gaze upon articles priced at two hundred per cent. above market value.

Towards this vanity fair Eli wended his way, hoping there would be some wrestling, because, if so, he was prepared to take off his coat and show how matches were won in his young days; and wherever he went respect was meted out to him. Gaffers and gammers bobbed like corks in a stream, but it was not until a policeman saluted that Eli guessed something was very much out of order. The cobbler of Fursdon was neatly dressed in his best clothes. He had a distinguished appearance,

a gentle aristocratic face, and honourable white head. Titled gentry were not unknown in that district, and some were eccentric old fellows, a trifle broad in speech—their grandfathers had spoken a dialect which few now would understand —and these had all been invited to come and have their fortunes told and purchase china-mugs for the good of the established religion, though most had declined, having obtained experience, and had sent a banker's blessing instead. The vicar and chief inquisitor had already been informed that an elderly gentleman had been delivered at the station by the London express and was then approaching the revels smelling strongly of guineas; and the ladies who bore him company, and would return to their homes that evening with reputations that many a ticket-of-leave man might envy, were convinced that this stranger would be consumed with a Crusader's zeal to have the lines of his hands read, to take shares in the lotteries, tickets in the raffle for a baby's basinette, to flirt with themselves, and to gamble generally, to the honour and glory of their dear mother church.

It was a general holiday, and the entire parish had consigned itself to an appreciation of what the printed bills described as a grand fete, without the accent, which the villagers condemned as mis-spelt and pronounced as the plural of foot. Eli walked on and presently became alarmed. Figures approached him in a disorderly manner, dressed like a lot of old picture-books, and a perspiring curate accompanied them, urging all to do their duty and not to forget the words he had put into their memories. Eli saw a giggling archbishop and a simpering knight-templar, a red-faced farmer grinning nervously beneath a tinsel crown of tyranny, and yet another who had apparently attired himself with kitchen utensils to represent a martial baron. Ladies also were there, and a duchess, who had very conspicuous hands and not much restraint over her features, loudly whispered to a companion wearing an insignia which was in danger of slipping down her back, "My, Annie! B'ain't yew a proper old fashion-plate!"

"Where's Queen Elizabeth?" screamed the curate.

"Here I be, sir," said a poor old dame, assisted forward by a staggering libel of Sir Francis Drake with a sword between his legs.

Eli began to wonder if he had reached the land of enchantment, but rejoiced to think of the stories he would have to tell his brother. He could make nothing out of this uncouth assembly, so turned aside and questioned an old man who stood under the hedge with his mouth half-open and severity upon the rest of his countenance. This old man was a good Methodist, and his idea of a holiday was to rebuke frivolity.

"Well, sir," he said, "'tis what parson calls a pageant. He ses these volk bided here once, but I don't believe it, and so I tell ye. 'Tis just a lot o' play-acting, and I ses 'twill lead volk to play cards and put their money on horse-racing."

"What be 'em going to du?" asked Eli.

"They'm going down into the field yonder to du play-acting. A lot of volk be going to see 'em, but I b'ain't," said the old man. "I reckon there be a thunderstorm coming up over, and 'twill be a judgment on 'em. I b'ain't afraid o' speaking out, sir," he added respectfully.

His own identity interested Eli far more than the pageant. He knew nothing much about either, so he asked the old man if he knew whom he was addressing.

"Policeman ses yew'm Mr Vivian to Fursdon, sir," came the answer in a decidedly doubtful voice.

Eli went on chuckling, determined to have some fun. It was only natural that the local constable should profess to know every one, and it was unlikely that any one there had ever seen Vivian, as the squire was a recluse at home and when he did travel went abroad. Eli made towards the tents, resolved to play the part thoroughly and enjoy a little pageant of his own. It would be necessary to preserve a severe countenance and not to speak. If he opened his mouth dialect would do for him.

At the gate of the field a shilling was demanded, and Eli

wanted to protest and call the sum exorbitant, but dared not. He paid and was passed into the place of pleasure. A young lady descended upon him immediately, bearing a withered rose, which she was prepared to sell him for another shilling, offering further to provide a pin for fastening it into his coat for a third shilling, and then he could return her the rose and the pin that she might practise extortion upon someone else. Eli passed on with a face of horror, but without a word, and another lady tackled him, and then another. They buzzed about him like hornets, asking for shillings, and offering little in exchange beyond the pleasure of knowing that he would be an accessory to the work of destruction; but Eli continued dumb, and strode along, merely wondering why the police didn't interfere, and observing mentally that the ladies were wearing "mighty fine butes."

Danger threatened from the clerical quarter. A group of black-coats turned a portion of their attention towards the new-comer, and the largest of them detached itself from the group and bore down upon Eli, distributing geniality and a lust for shillings as it approached the large and wall-like back which was very rudely presented towards it. Eli, in fact, was in full flight, and the black-coat pursued along two tent lengths and once round the temporary band-stand. Nothing was known in that place, which was thirty miles from Fursdon, about Vivian, except that he was rich and eccentric; and there was no longer the slightest doubt about that.

The last and largest tent seemed to offer attractions, as there was a hum of excitement within and the sound of a human voice unduly straining itself. Eli read a notice outside, and learnt that a stupendous rummage-sale and a grand concert were being held therein. Adjectives were cheap that day. He attempted to enter, but a fair lady, whose boots were magnificent, appeared with a smile, and mentioned that the price would be one shilling.

Eli came near to putting off the raiment of gentility which clothed him thus expensively, but the voice warbling in the

cool depths of the tent allured him, so he paid and entered. The voice was so beautiful he was sure the singer would possess angelic loveliness; but when privileged to gaze upon the platform he beheld a fat and stumpy female, with a red and bulbous nose, who was imploring everyone within reach to come and be birds. The tent was half full of village women grubbing greedily in the piles of rummage.

At last Eli felt at home. He comprehended rummage-sales, Fursdon had not escaped them, and here at least was cheapness. An old kettle could be bought for two farthings and articles of vertu were going at twopence. He forgot his borrowed rank as he examined a pair of the vicar's trousers, which could be his for sixpence, and yonder were boots ridiculously cheap, though worth nothing at all in their then condition, but Eli knew he could restore the lot and sell them at a profit.

"How much did yew pay to come inside, my dear?" he asked one of the women, who was trying to work out the problem whether a pair of stockings, one black, the other brown, and both much darned, would prove a remunerative investment at a halfpenny.

"A penny, sir," she answered.

"Then 'em owes me elevenpence," Eli muttered somewhat crossly.

The lady on the platform, having taken the encore for granted, was now expressing a desire to be furnished with a pair of wings. Eli did not listen, for the black peril was upon him. The vicar entered the tent, without paying even a penny, anxious possibly to discover how his old clothes were going, and, beholding Eli, he smiled and dodged here and there, seeking encouragement to give him welcome. Eli walked round boldly, casting the borrowed aristocracy aside as something beyond his means, and, jerking his head in the direction of the pile of boots, announced his readiness of buying that lot of old trade, if he could be provided with a sack.

The vicar showed signs of paralysis, his right hand dis-

appeared, coldness stiffened his features, and he muttered something about a little mistake. It was entirely the fault of that stupid policeman.

"I ha' been having a little pageant," Eli explained. "I can't afford no more on't, vor there be twelve pennies in a shilling where I comes from. I comed here a squire, and I'll go away an old cobbler wi' they butes on my back."

"I hope this is not a practical joke," said the vicar awkwardly.

"'Tis a pageant just," repeated Eli. "I'll buy they old butes, parson. And if yew likes to get the young fellows in a tent, and charge a shilling to come in, I'll show the volks some wrestling."

This offer was not accepted, because anything in the way of self-defence suggested prize-fighting, which was not only brutalising but actually illegal. The vicar said as much, and remarked also he should be sorry to raise money by such means; and then he departed, leaving Eli to bargain for the boots.

Afterwards he enjoyed himself, but black clouds were gathering. There were plently of rough characters in the place, and as it was a general holiday they assembled where all village plots are hatched, and worked themselves into a state of indignation against the inhabitant of a foreign parish who had dared to disguise himself as a gentleman and come there to insult them. Eli's object was merely to sneer at their "feet," to suggest that things were far better done in his parish; they looked upon his kindly face as an affront, and his laugh was an invitation to battle. As the afternoon drew on some of the young fellows gathered about Eli, hustling him, making remarks about men who thought themselves better than their neighbours. Eli kept his temper easily, but at last withdrew from the field. He was beginning to feel tired. Lifting the sack of boots upon his shoulder he went up the lane towards the church, which stood upon the top of a small hill, and there he rested among the graves and the flowers.

The only sounds which reached him there were the shrieks of young women from the fête-ground. Why they should express pleasure by shrieking Eli did not know, but probably it was always so. The churchyard gate was rotten and dragged heavily upon the hinges; the paths were covered with weeds; great docks and nettles flourished in the corners, and the grass was allowed to go to seed. A few shillings would have made the place tidy, but these were not spent; and instead a large sum was being extorted to make hideous what was really beautiful, for the church was very fine in its decay; the stone-work looked like torn lace, velvet mosses were hanging from the gutters, wall-flowers had obtained root-hold in the crevices, and golden saxifrages ruled the arches like gentle queens. The builder would mar all that. He would be thorough in his destruction of what was beautiful, because destruction would mean work.

There was a simple mound without a stone, and covered with simple flowers picked in some cottage garden; and among the flowers nestled a scrap of paper torn from a school exercise-book, and scrawled upon the paper were the words, "To dear mother, from Bessie and Annie." It was the simplest touch of human nature imaginable, a piece of sentiment which defied all creeds. Religion was not sought after, nor any divine presence, but weak mortal mother; the children wanted what they could understand. Mother was there somehow and would like a present; and, whatever they might be taught in that old building, mother would be always there and fond of flowers. The rush for shillings became contemptible.

Eli turned from the mound and the scrap of paper which bore in a child's handwriting the only creed. It was getting on towards evening, the lights were changing, it would soon be time to return to the station and finish the day. His white head was shaking, perhaps because he loved the flowers. If Bessie and Annie had been there, he would have told them about his garden, about Tom and his little brother, and he might have sent them by the post tall white lilies to give

to mother, which would give their flowers to mother every year.

But Bessie and Annie were not there. Instead, he saw ugly faces at the gate, those faces which mar everything like black blight, even if they are few in number; and he heard ugly voices, and saw hands emptying his sack and throwing the old boots about as a proclamation of independence. These were young men and badly grown, like trees bent in an early stage, men who were growing crooked, not knowing what their bodies required, and feeding them poisonously because that seemed to give a kind of strength.

"Leave they butes bide," called Eli sternly.

The gate was pushed open and the holiday-makers lurched in, brave as lions because they were many; and one of them stumbled across the simple mound and crushed the children's flowers.

"Us'll larn 'en to come here and laugh at we."

"He'm only an old man. Throw 'en in the pond."

Such were the cries which went up, but they made Eli smile, and he put out his great arms in the old-fashioned style and muttered to himself in his big-hearted way, "I wish my young brother wur here." These clumsy drunkards were like a spider which mistakes a wasp in its web for a fly. They saw an old white head and did not know they were running against a giant's strength, with skill added to it.

There was a pond just outside the gate, chiefly liquid mud, coated with green slime. When the plotters had seen Eli making for the church, they decided he should be forced into that pond, where tradition whispered poor old dames of old called witches had been smothered. Time and place were favourable, as the village was deserted; and then they could gather the neighbours at the station to jeer at Eli as he departed in a vesture of mud, after arriving as a fine gentleman.

"Yew'm a blasphemious lot o' toads!" called Eli, angry at last. The crushing of those flowers had roused him, and the blood of a long line of fighters was hot in his arms. He did

not strike, he threw; and when either of the Rescorlas threw a man, he did not rise quickly.

"Catch hold of his arms and legs," shouted the ringleader from the background; and they made a rush which Eli met like a rock, and then drove the rabble before him through the gate and penned them in a corner made by the wall of the churchyard with the hedge that ran down to the pond. The biggest broke away, but Eli had him round the waist, and the next instant came a splash which sent the green slime flying; and the faces of the conspirators became green likewise.

"Yew trod on the posies," cried Eli, tackling another; and a second splash sent the slime whirling.

Some were climbing the wall; others were tearing through the bushes on the hedge; one was lying on his back, crying for mercy. "I ask your pardon, master. Don't ye throw me in. I can't swim, master," he yelled.

"Yew'm a dirty lot," said old Eli. "Best go and enlist vor soldiers. Proper soldiers yew would mak'. This b'ain't fighting," he cried. "There b'ain't a man here who can stand square. 'Tis throwing a lot of old muck abroad."

He collected the boots, replaced them in the sack, swung it over his shoulder, feeling refreshed and strong after the little tussle, then made off towards the station, smiling, shaking his white head and murmuring, "I ha' beat my little brother after all."

CHAPTER XI

ABOUT A BATTLE OF THE STREETS

Oli reached no land of romance, but at the first stopping-place he sighted familiar objects, a cart and ancient Wreford with his head drooping over the pony. Mark was there, pointing at the moorland road like a sign-post, and as the train jolted itself still, he patted the old man on the back, ran for the platform, saw the light of Oli's countenance, heard the welcome of his voice, and joined him. That was a day of good omen; the last few hours had been full of favours. Mark had sold some sketches, and better than that:—

While escorting Old Coles from Love Lane, the squire saw them, for the road wriggled beside one of his terraces, and Vivian was walking there with his dogs, seeing as much as he wanted to. He called; the little cart ceased its wobbling, Old Coles made an obeisance, while Mark passed through a gateway and stood before the man whom he had not seen for some years and then had beaten.

"Well, Mark Yeo, I have heard about you. I congratulate you," said the squire.

"What for, sir?"

"You have offended the godly and overthrown the righteous. I presume, therefore, you are the enemy of evil. I hear also you have received the gift of tongues and you are indecent in truthfulness. I hope you won't get your head broken."

"There are difficulties ahead, sir," said Mark quietly. "I shall have a go at them and do a little if I can before I die."

"Ah, yes, I should object to dying," said Vivian in his puzzling way. "As for difficulties, we all have them. A man

of moderate tastes finds it difficult to spend his income. Don't be too religious, Mark Yeo. If you are, you will bore people. All my servants are most religious. The cook cannot approach a saucepan without bursting into alleluias."

"You can't get at these men without religion, sir. They believe in it and it touches them," said Mark. "It is offensive and defensive. It protects the speaker against violence, and it softens his hearers. When you get them soft, sir, is the time to press your point in."

"You seem to be winning your place among the minor prophets," said Vivian, swinging those eye-glasses which he never wore. "What have you been doing since I tried to give you a little advice?"

"Learning to speak and think, sir."

"An excellent thing, knowledge. It shows a man what a fool he is. When is the dedication of the temple to take place?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"This house of Rechab which you propose to erect. Hosken speaks of it with tears in his eyes. He declares you are going to start a new religion, a sober one, and your disciples will grow long hair, never cut their nails, and take to themselves an illegal number of helpmeets."

"Why, sir, it's only a dream of mine," said Mark, flushing. "I am trying to get hold of a building where one thing only shall be taught, and that sobriety. Keep a man sober, sir, and you make him a good citizen. He may have strange opinions, he may be cynical," said Mark cuttingly, "but his mind will be clear."

"I am delighted with you," the squire murmured.

"When a man is a drunkard he becomes everything that is bad," Mark went on. "First he is a liar, then a stirrer-up of strife, and last of all he loses his moral sense; and he hands on these evils to the next generation. If I could get the building, the helpers would come—fanatics, Mr Hosken would call them. Ah, sir," said Mark earnestly, "the creation of life was the act of a fanatic."

"Poetry too," the squire muttered.

"The clergy dare not denounce drunkenness as it should be denounced, because it is an established and, here at least, a recognised vice. In my little building the vice should have all its sores exposed."

"I can assure you, Hosken preaches against it," said Vivian. "I have often heard him. 'Please don't drink spirits. I am sure they will disagree with you, but I should be the last man in the world to deprive a fellow-creature of his beer.' Hosken derives his income from beer."

"Sir," said Mark firmly, "there are two things which go together, death and something else. And drunkenness is a part of that something else."

Vivian did not jeer. There was in Mark's words a horror which was left to the imagination, which he possessed, and he did not like to think of it.

"You shall have a subscription," he said. "Come to my study."

Mark went, and was staggered when he received ten pounds; but less than ever could he understand the heart of the squire.

"I shall be very interested to hear of your progress," said Vivian, as Mark was about to join Old Coles. "I really do not see why you shouldn't dine with me one night—now." Vivian looked at Mark with his queer dark eyes, then added, "When I write I shall tell his lordship I am delighted with you."

Mark stepped forward, with something like anger in his eyes and a little fear; but the squire was already hidden in one of his dark passages, and Mark could hear his laughter as he went along it.

He had, however, some excuse for feeling cheerful that morning, with the sunlight wrapping the moor and the breeze coming over it and sweeping the rocky terrace which cleverness had constructed for a railway. There was contagion also in the smiling countenance of Oli, who had a "God bless you" in his heart for every man. He almost dragged Mark into the compartment—there was only one other occupant, an old gipsy with a radiant handkerchief round her neck, who seemed

to be having a dog-sleep,—bombarded him with questions, and told the story of the conquest of brother Eli down to the last detail.

"Be yew agwaine to preach?" he asked admiringly, for to string words together into the form of a speech was a wonder in the sight of Oli.

"I've got a bit of business in Plymouth. We started yesterday and slept in the cart last night. But we couldn't get along fast enough for me," said Mark. "I'm always in a hurry to get a thing done, and as I had money in my pocket, I decided to come along by train."

"I ha' got money in my pocket tu," said Oli proudly, fumbling and producing a handful of white and brown objects. "I wouldn't count mun," he said cautiously. "When yew counts money he shrinks. Let mun bide and he gets bigger. I ha' never heard yew preach, Mark."

"I don't preach. I talk to the folk and try and make them think for themselves. It's want of thought that does half the mischief."

"They ses yew shouts and calls 'em names," said Oli.

"I lose my temper sometimes. It makes me mad to see the faces of some of them, and I call them fools to put life into them. I've had a bit of luck," said Mark in an eager boyish fashion. Then he told the old man about Vivian's gift.

"He'm a kind gentleman," said Oli.

Mark went on to talk of his plans, full of words and enthusiasm, not heeding the old woman in the corner, who seemed asleep; how that he intended to hire a building which he hoped might progress from a small beginning to be the centre of a great crusade against the hydra; there at first speeches would be delivered free from cant or bias, and pledges would be taken; there, if growth followed, literature would be prepared, young men trained for the work and sent out as missionaries into the villages ready to speak the truth and not afraid of stones; and zeal at last might make the rising formidable.

"Total prohibition, that is what we are aiming at. It's the

only solution of the problem," said Mark. "When they say to me you want to deprive the working-man of his glass of beer, I reply, Yes, but I would also deprive the rich man of his glass of wine. Partial prohibition, as it is practised in some countries, is unjust and ridiculous. I have been in these countries and seen for myself. Introduce permits and you make the evil worse than before. If there are three drinking-houses in a village, and you close two, you are centralising the evil and making it stronger. Liquor must go, and if a man must have strong drink let him go abroad. He is a man the country can afford to lose."

"Now yew'm preaching," chuckled Oli. "Us ought to send yew into Parliament, my dear."

"Life is too short for building towers of Babel," replied Mark. "These revolutions are brought about by the people themselves, or not at all. I believe if the votes of the entire population were taken to-morrow there would be a large majority in favour of total prohibition, and I also believe most of the drunkards would be upon my side."

The train stopped again, and the old gipsy woman rose. She had made no previous motion. She had not appeared to open her eyes, nor had she fumbled at all with her clothing; but as she passed Mark her skinny, earth-brown fingers pushed a halfpenny into his hand, and, while going out she said, "I've had children, young man." That was all. She added nothing to that past tense, and departed into the past, so far as Mark was concerned, leaving him to make up his list of subscriptions received,—

Squire Vivian, . .	£10	os.	od
An old gipsy woman, .			½d.

That was how Mark set it down, but perhaps the sums were recorded elsewhere in a different order.

Mark left Oli at Plymouth and went into the streets with the cobbler's parting words sounding in his ears, "Men who till yew-trees don't till for themselves." It was the ordinary

saying of that accursed well-meant thing indifference. Leave the thing alone, because if any good is done you will not live to see it. Another generation will take the good and the credit to itself. Mark was endeavouring to plant a tree whose growth would be slow indeed, a tree which would not root on the heights because of the wind, and those that passed by would break down the wall, and the wild creatures would come and grub it up. But if it should take root, what a shelter it would afford, what a wind-break, and how happily future generations would settle beneath its branches!

Mark walked the streets; not blindly, because Temperance had given him an address; not gladly, because he was afraid. Cold-blooded duty was before him, and he shrank from it selfishly, almost hoping he would fail to find Patience. Two faces were before him, but well apart, like heaven and hell; the one spiritual, the other a growth of sheer materialism; the one a curse to men, the other a salvation—Patience and Edith. The space of the world was too short to measure the difference between them; yet both were women.

Mark entered unpleasant streets and still descended into greater darkness and more dirt. What a strange mind it was that deliberately preferred such ways to the heights, which accepted smoke and rejected sunshine, which exalted the reek of the gutters above the smell of furze-blossom. It was a long descent, and the only sign of prosperity was to be found in the pawn-shops.

He reached the house, and there was no need to knock, for a sharp-featured woman knelt at the door-step washing a strip of linoleum full of holes. All the windows were tightly shut, and the smell of the passage was sour. There was a heat about it suggestive of a place where growths are unduly forced for the market, to flower for a day and then to die.

Mark satisfied the woman that he had nothing to do with the law, though she observed she was herself respectable and had not brought herself within the reach of it. She was a widow, maintaining herself as best she could by letting lodgings with-

out being too particular. She had two or three young ladies stopping there, and one of them perhaps answered to Mark's description. "She calls herself Violet," she added. "She's not a bad young woman."

"Do you know how she gets her living?"

"I've got mine to make, and I don't ask questions," said the woman crossly.

"Can I see her?" asked Mark.

"She's out. You'd best try Union Street."

Mark returned to a healthier district and walked the streets for hours, but could not find Patience, who called herself Violet, names which began with the same letters as pleasure and vice. Rain descended, wind blew, and he took shelter in an eating-house, watching those who passed the window, and presently it grew dark, lamps were lighted, and the streets began to shine. Mark ventured forth again, knowing he must succeed; and as he went the light glistened upon the foundation-stone of a granite building, and the sign was there, not diaphanous as it was upon Dartmoor, but black and tempestuous, and the message that came to him was "Try Devonport."

So Mark went to his fate feeling the shadow of it, but seeing and hearing nothing clearly, going because it was necessary, dragged along by the grim sergeant duty from one town to another, along the noisy streets, across the dreary bridge and into the third town; and there was no merciful accident to hold him back. The rain had stopped, Mark rounded a corner aglow with strong false light, and there he saw—a well-dressed girl being dragged along by two young sailors.

There seemed to be an emptiness and desolation all around. The girl struggled a little, but did not scream, and the young fellows laughed at the fun of treating womanhood like refuse. They dragged her from the road, trailing her fine skirts through the dirty water in the gutter and towards the door of the public-house; and at last Mark saw her face, at the same moment he heard her speak, "Dirty young swine, you've got no money! I won't treat you any more."

Mark stepped forward and stood before the door. "Lads," he said, "we don't do this sort of thing in the Navy"; and as they released the girl he caught her hand, fearing lest she might run away.

In a moment they were alone, for the young sailors, who were out on a drunken spree and meant no harm, had caught sight of a clean-shaven face, which suggested an officer, and hurried off to avoid recognition; while Patience stared at her protector, and said, in a silly voice, "Hello, Charlie!"

It was the same face, and yet quite different, for all the bloom was off, the roundness had gone, the chin was sharper. The light from the tavern fell upon her face and those polluted lips. Temperance had changed far more. The sister who had resigned herself to duty had been marred outwardly far more than the one who had given herself over to vice, neither had she any such fine clothes to cover herself with. It seemed an injustice that the hard-worker should be punished more than the pleasure-seeker; but Temperance had her eyes left, and her sister's had been put out.

"So I have found you at last, Patience," he said.

"I'll be damned if I know you!" she answered, almost too careless to look at him.

"Yes, you do. I came here to find you. Now I am going to take you back to Love Lane."

He expected some sort of an exclamation, a scene, or a struggle to get away; but Patience only turned and stared as if dead to every human emotion. It was horrible to see a living creature stare like that.

"You are coming back with me," he said firmly.

"Why—aren't you dead by this time? It was years ago."

"Not very long, Patience; but a fast life makes the time seem slow."

"I thought you might turn up. I'm not going back," she said with a note of terror.

"Are you so happy, then?"

"I don't know. It's not what I thought. The fellows do

knock you about so. I'm quite a lady, Mark, ain't I?" she said suddenly, kicking out her muddy flounces.

Mark sickened at the question.

"Tempy hasn't got clothes like these."

"She has better ones," said Mark shortly. Then he turned, still holding her by the hand, and said, "Come with me."

"I won't!" she cried; but she had to.

It was half an hour later, and the struggle had become real. They were on the road beneath the Hoe, and it was dark, for mist rolled over them from the sea, and rain was falling again. Mark was getting exhausted; his health was never good, and he had been on his feet all day. Patience was fighting to get away from him. She was on her knees in the dirt, her dress was torn, her hat was nearly off. She had been cursing, biting his hands, spitting at him, but she could not get away, and he was wearing her down gradually with his mind, as he might have worn her down that evening in Love Lane, simply holding her arm, and saying, "Come with me," until that brutal spirit should be driven out.

"You've got me, you damned Methodist!" she snarled. "I can't scream, for the police are down on me. They think I stole some money from a chap. I wish one of my pals would come along."

"I'm going to take you back to Love Lane," he repeated in the voice which had beaten Vivian.

"Can't you pick up any other girl?"

"It's your soul I'm after, Patience."

"Curse my soul! You preachers—you do nothing but make hell for us."

She flung herself back. He held on, and, falling against him, she bit his arm, making him gasp. He remembered grimly that Temperance had lost her teeth.

"There's my soul for you," she panted. "Look here, Mark, let me go, and I'll drown myself."

"I shall not let you go."

"I've lived enough," she muttered. "I've had all I wanted,

and I'll finish myself off now. I won't go back to Fursdon. Oh, my God, I'm wet to the skin, and my clothes are spoilt!"

"Don't mention that name," said Mark.

"Damn you, I can have a God as well as you, and I'll swear at——"

He put his hand upon her mouth and silenced her.

"Patience, you are a woman. Remember what a woman can be," he said, thinking of Edith. "You shall leave this life."

"Murder me, then. Strangle me, if you're so strong, and be hanged for it."

She fought with him again, struck her head against the wall, screamed, and was motionless.

Another hour had gone by. Fog was upon the three towns, and pedestrians passed like spirits. Mark and Patience came up from the sea. He was white and ill, she sick and dizzy, and both looked bloodless. The fight was not over, but the combatants were exhausted. They kept away from the lamps because of the mud which was upon them, and Mark's cheeks were bleeding, where she had scratched him. They said nothing, but Patience was sobbing madly. They stopped again beside a high railing. Over the way was the window of a shop, where a dull light gleamed, obscured by fog, and a melancholy sound came from it.

"Are you going to give way?" said Mark as kindly as he could.

"No," she cried.

"You won't shake me off."

"What could I do to Fursdon?"

"Start again. You are young."

"Marry a ploughboy?"

"Live decently."

"I couldn't. I can't go back. They wouldn't have me."

"Temperance would."

"What's the time?" she asked stupidly.

"It is getting late. The first train in the morning I shall take you back."

"I want a drink. I must have a drink. You have torn my clothes, and I've taken no money. Give me some money."

Mark did not listen. He was gazing across the road towards the window of those ghastly sounds, and then he said, "Why did you say you would drown yourself?"

"To make an end of it," she sobbed.

"It would be making a beginning. Look across."

"Is there a policeman?" she said, cringing.

"At the window."

"I don't see anything."

"Come across."

He drew her on, and they reached the window, but Patience had her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Look!" he muttered. "There are worse things than death."

There came a scream, and the girl was beaten. She had looked, and seen one smoky lamp, and by the light of it two small, dark-bearded men tapping like ghouls at a long black coffin. Now she was hanging to him, imploring him not to leave her. "I'll come back," she moaned. "I will, Mark—if you marry me."

There was no reply, but Mark's face was deathlike. He could not, for the loathing with which he now regarded her, for the hopeless love with which he regarded another, he could not; for the sake of his life's work, and the duty which lay before him, for the small dream of happiness to which he was surely entitled, and for his reputation in the eyes of his patron in a far country, he could not.

"Patience," he muttered at last, steadying himself against that ghastly window, "remember what you are."

"I can't come else. What could I do? And I won't come unless you marry me. I'll drown myself rather."

There was a chance of saving her by sacrificing himself, and nothing else would serve. If he refused she must be lost; if he accepted she might still be rescued. It was the vengeance of the spirit of evil upon the man who was armed with strength.

"I promise," he said to the knell-like tapping of those hammers.

CHAPTER XII

ABOUT A STRIFE IN THE WOOD

WHILE Mark was looking for Patience, Mrs Allen and Edith were lunching with Vivian. They had not been invited, but Mrs Allen was not the sort of woman who waited to be asked. She would enter a house with all the noise and fuss of a fly of the order Bombylius, and the only way to eject her was to open the door and drive her out. She was dull, nothing was doing, there was not an orgy of any kind, no shedding of blood, not even a croquet tournament, nor did the flowers in the church require renewing; so she decided to drive over to Fursdon and kill a few reputations with the squire. She went, making a lot of dust.

It was stupidity that made her brutal to the weak, gave her criminal instincts, and made her as unmoral as Patience, who would lie and steal, had regarded domestic service as compulsory hard labour, and master and mistress as natural enemies. Mrs Allen was merely Patience in a higher class, knowing more because she had been taught more, but ignorant of the only things worth knowing. She, too, might have said, "See what a fine lady I am," simply because her clothes were good. It was not a desire to do evil which had led Patience astray. It was stupidity: an inability to think about more than one thing, and that one wholly base; and Mrs Allen was going to the same end by a different road, because she, too, could think only of one thing, her own pleasure, and was too stupid to know that pleasure is not a friend, not an ally, but the most bitter of enemies—when it is composed of self

entirely. It was stupidity which made her also rather afraid of Edith; ignorant that a fine nature disdains to be avenged upon an evil one, and leaves it to be blown about in its own dust until it is carried into the everlasting cesspool.

Vivian was walking about as usual, up and down the passages, the gardens, lawns, and woods, his extraordinary hat over his eyes, his long arms swinging, his body leaning forward. His life was going in these apparently aimless rambles, which yet satisfied him completely. He was of the land, and he loved it; he was fond of every tree and shrub, caressed the leaves of one, and patted the trunk of the other. His woods and fields were a part of himself; and even when he went abroad his heart was there, beating up and down the passages, throbbing in the corners of the woods where there were marshes and the reeds grew high. If he had a sorrow it was a feeling that the land and himself were not in perfect unison; he would be divorced from the trees some day, and they would be joined to another partner who would not love them as he had done.

"Thinking of villainy," he murmured, smiling, for it was an interesting subject, and he had just been comparing the Tartuffe of Molière with Shakespeare's Iago, "I imagine very few critics comprehend what it is. There is little real villainy in the world, because men are not clever enough, and cleverness is essential to villainy. A murderer is not necessarily a villain. He is simply a beast which bites another. I think Mark Yeo might be a villain, with opportunities and money, and Spiller might be one too. They are very interesting young men. Ah, heavenly thing!"

He paused before a grey-flowered ceanothus, and brushed his face against the blooms.

"They are all down upon Iago," he went on, in his smiling way. "No motive, they say. But it is the perfection of villainy not to require a motive. There was never a genius who blundered so often as Shakespeare, but in Iago he portrayed villainy in its highest form. Villainy is the desire to torture an inoffensive being. If there is a grudge to be paid off the artistic

effect is lost. Hosken would never make a villain," the squire rambled on. "He is such a fool—poor thing—but Mark Yeo is clever. I am certain that young man will turn out a villain."

Drunkards believe they, at least, are sober; to lunatics all the world is mad. As for Vivian, he was well known as a public benefactor, a subscriber to charities, a builder of cottages, and the strong man who was ready to bear the burdens of Fursdon upon his shoulders.

"Mrs Allen and Miss Gribbin," he said, when a servant came and told him they had come. "I like them both. A dear little lady, Mrs Allen—Lady Macbeth had a neurotic temperament too, only she didn't know how to use it. I must find some worms for Mrs Allen. There is nothing else available just now, and I am sure she will want to kill something."

He walked towards the house, murmuring genially, "I always feel I ought to be a Roman emperor when Mrs Allen comes to see me, so that I could burn a few servants on the lawn for her amusement. Not that she has any villainous instincts: she is much too stupid. She is simply a perch among minnows. She is a gross feeder. I like Mrs Allen."

The ladies met him upon the front lawn, and Vivian, who missed nothing, perceived that Edith had changed. Her face was more delicate, and her eyes were darker; but she was certainly acquiring beauty, for sadness suited her face, which had not been made for laughter.

Mrs Allen did not share her good things with anyone, unless she had to, therefore Edith was told to amuse herself while she talked business with the squire. There was some business, or what Mrs Allen regarded as such, because she was Edith's guardian and had the girl's happiness to consider. Now she wanted Vivian's advice as to the treatment usually prescribed for stubborn young women who insist upon contracting unsuitable marriages. "She's going to marry the curate," exclaimed Mrs Allen, after a long preamble.

"'Thou shalt not marry the curate' is, I believe, one of the

suppressed commandments," said Vivian. 'Is there any impediment?"

"He is altogether unsuitable—and there is young Dick Luxmoore with all his money, wild to marry her."

"I like matrimony. I shall marry some day," said the squire.

"Edith is my niece—— "

"Has she made any complaint?"

"Oh do listen, and don't be sarcastic. I know her father was only a curate, and absolutely mad; but still he married my sister. This Spiller's father is a tradesman. He sells pig's flesh."

"I have always encouraged people to keep pigs. The possibilities of that excellent animal are still not properly appreciated. Here you see pigs are providing the church with a minister, this parish with a curate, and your niece with a husband. From the sty to an archbishopric is merely a matter of geometrical progression," said the squire.

"What am I to do?" asked Mrs Allen.

"Have you shaken the peccant damsel?"

"I have sworn at her."

"Now I should buy her some fish-carvers."

"Can't I forbid the banns?" she asked foolishly.

"The girl is of age. She may choose her own affliction," said Vivian. "I like Spiller. I am going to give him a living when the present man has done with it."

"There's no money in it."

"Quite enough, especially if Spiller breeds pigs which his father can buy. Spiller & Son, pork-butchers and parsons. I like that idea."

"Have you heard," asked Mrs Allen, in her mysterious voice, "that he drinks?"

"Having no particular desire to perish of thirst, I do likewise."

"Both the Hoskens declare he drinks," she insisted.

"Hosken is a good critic, no doubt. My dear creature," said the cynical squire, "if it is reputations that you are after, you shall have them. I am informed on the best authority

that last night shortly before midnight, though the exact time is immaterial, our excellent rector kicked his wife in the ribs, and Spiller, in a condition of gibbering inebriation, stood on his head upon the top of the tower. I may also inform you that I am maintaining a harem in that wing of the house, and the reason I do not go into society is the altogether sufficient one that I am too busily engaged with my black-eyed houris."

Mrs Allen laughed in her empty way, not daring to be angry with the great man; but she was annoyed nevertheless, and said rather snappishly, "There is always some truth in these reports."

"Nobody believes the truth. The high percentage of exaggeration is accepted and the rest discarded. Mark Yeo is convinced that the whole village is rotten with drink, just because the boys get drunk on Saturday nights. He might as well believe I am a glutton because I eat my dinner when I'm not hungry."

Had Mrs Allen been endowed with any sort of sense, she might have guessed that Vivian had nothing to offer her except mannerisms; but she had no knowledge and little more character. She was not a model but a lay-figure, and when any strong hand set her in a certain position there she remained.

"I hope you aren't afraid the little girl will be too happy?" he suggested.

"Of course not—what folly! I should like her to marry well——"

"Why?" he interrupted; and the question was too sudden. Mrs Allen floundered and could only mutter, "Isn't it natural? She is my niece."

"And a nice girl. I like her."

"Then you had better marry her yourself," said she crossly.

"I must really request you not to be——"

"I will not be sworn at."

"You are permitted to get angry. It will give you an appetite for lunch," said Vivian.

Edith was walking in the prettiest part of the garden, and as she went she brushed away spiders' webs, because gauzy flies were dancing to and fro, and it pained her to think they might fall into the snares. There seemed an unusual number of spiders in that purposely ill-kept garden. Looking up, she saw the squire slouching along the walk. He looked big and powerful, and the breeze made the tall flowers bow to him as if in homage.

"I have sent the painted lady indoors and have come to add you to my collection, Miss Vanessa," he said. "What shall I feed you on? Will you take some lavender, or is a little blue borage more to your taste?"

Edith brightened at once. She respected Vivian, admired him like a distant mountain, and yet in that mood he jarred somewhat. Compliments came heavily from him: the machinery could be heard creaking, there was obvious labour. When he spoke pleasantly he was dull.

"There is not much of the butterfly about me," she said.

"More of the white and ghostly moth, or the queen-bee perhaps. Mrs Allen tells me you propose to take a nuptial flight."

Edith flushed, looked down into the humbler flowers, murmuring, "Do you think I am wise?"

"Well, no, not in the literal sense," said the squire, returning to the mood which suited him best. "What am I to give you for a wedding-gift?"

"A little advice," said Edith, looking up with piteous eyes. "Will you?"

"Domestic economy, so much to the baker, so much to the butcher, and how to avoid paying the grocer—it is beyond me, Miss Edith."

"No, no," she said, without smiling. "You are the only wise man about here. Mr Hosken knows nothing."

"On the subject of bisques, he is, I am told, infallible. You were not at church last Sunday morning, I believe, when he had the misfortune to forget himself and say, 'Let us play.'"

"I can trust you," she went on, as if he had not interrupted. "There is the gong. Come and sip your honey."

"I must speak to you now I have the chance. Mr Vivian, tell me—Gerard dines with you."

"It is very good of him," the squire said when she paused.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked pitifully. "Is it illness?"

"Neuralgia, he tells me. A nervous creature. You will have to wrap him up in flannel."

"If I could only show you his letters. They are dreadful, but he tells me nothing. He is always writing, and every sentence seems to say, 'Edith, help me.'"

There was no giving way in her eyes. Edith was not a crying sort; but she stood in a bruised attitude, and Vivian tried his hardest to be sorry for her, tried and could not be, for he had scorned his fellow-beings too long. Had she broken one of his favourite shrubs he would have been sorry for that.

"Do men drink when they are in pain?" she whispered.

"Frequently. It is a mistake, but it gives relief."

"It is like taking poison to escape the sorrows of life," she said.

"Few of us are strong. We are not all like Mark Yeo, the son of Cyclops," he said with an unmistakable sneer.

"The first time Gerard dined with you he drank too much. He told me."

"Did he really?" said the squire, in an astonished voice. "I don't remember. I generally go to sleep after dinner."

"You must tell me, please, what you think about him," said Edith, coming nearer and putting up a small white face. "He has dined with you often since then. Has he been good?" she asked, almost childishly. "I know you are kind; your hospitality is overwhelming; you would naturally offer him what if he is really weak he should not touch, it is a social duty, I believe, and he might be afraid of offending you. I have heard a report that lately he had to be helped home. Tell me is that true?"

"Servants will have tongues," he said lightly.

"Is it true?" she whispered.

"I think you suspect the young man of getting at my liquors while I slumber."

"Don't try and shield him if he has been wicked. Think what it means to me. Tell me, Mr Vivian, does Gerard drink?"

"Let us go and eat," said the squire.

"I must be told," she said, holding him by the coat and making him uncomfortable and angry.

"He is quite young," said Vivian carelessly. "Most young men have a taste for old brandy. I can assure you, Miss Edith, mine is not adulterated."

"How much does he take when he comes here?"

"My dear young lady, I really cannot act as a sort of Turkish spy upon my guests, and chalk up the number of glasses of wine they may choose to drink. Spiller is a nice fellow. I like him. It is quite a good idea of yours marrying him. He likes a bottle to take home with him," he added carelessly. "Ah, that is an unfortunate admission, perhaps."

Edith's head drooped, and suddenly she made her face invisible; but her little body shook painfully, and she said nothing more. Words were not wanted, least of all those that were humming about her ears like vicious hornets:

"What will you take back with you? We will go to the greenhouses after luncheon, and you must have some flowers. It will give me a great pleasure to pick them for you."

Vivian was always giving—far too much.

When Mrs Allen was ready to go, loaded with gifts, Edith had disappeared, after leaving with the lodge-keeper a message that she was walking home. This she had intended to do in any case, for she had promised to meet Gerard in the fir-wood, her usual haunt where Mark had first discovered her. Here she had dreamed, and here she would be practical. She, like Patience, was about to oppose a man; not for the lusts, but against them.

The honest old tradesman, Gerard's father, never talked about his wife's relations. They had been a little easy in their lives, and his wife's father had shut himself up for a good many years, until one day an inquest was held, a verdict, kinder than it might have been, was returned; the burial service at his funeral was emasculated, and his children agreed for the ordinary purposes of conversation to ascribe his decease to nervous debility, and not to mention the bottle which had begun and the pistol which had finished a very ordinary tragedy. The doctrine of the transmission of acquired characteristics by means of seed is known well enough. If a wild plant is placed in garden soil, it may not only change its character and produce double flowers, but it will also pass on the change to its seedlings. Human life is not so far above that of plants as to be able to disregard this peculiarity; and thus a danger lurks in every marriage. The father is the author of being, the mother is the nurse; she cannot give life, but she can hand on the characteristic transmitted to her by the author of her being, nor can she avoid doing so. Thus there was in Gerard a portion of that unhealthy life, which had impelled his mother's father to shut himself up and rot. The evil had been latent; he hardly knew it was there, until the squire had made it live.

Plenty of insects visit the plants so as to ensure the pollination of the flowers, and some bring grains of poison on their legs. If a dark spot is in the character and cannot assert itself and grow unaided, it calls the insects. They came to Gerard; neuralgia was the name of one; depression, a feeling of hopelessness, a conviction that he had been born for no good purpose were others, coming when he was alone and tired, with a maddening buzz; and they stirred the dark spot into growth. One thing made him forget, lent a kind of happiness—it was pleasant also to roll about the small room, laughing, feeling immensely strong, afraid of nothing—and as for the evil, why, it was universal, and that same rolling, that same laughter went on everywhere, in kings' palaces, in labourers' cottages,

in the huts of savages; and if such noise and movements proclaimed to the quiet stars that there was a world in space, the inhabitants of which were all weak fools—for the strong and wise would not be noticed—his abstention could not alter that opinion. A strong pain called for a strong remedy; the taste of that old brandy was good: it suggested flowers and fruit, it was too excellent and soothing to be dangerous; he was using it medicinally, not to satisfy any base appetite. It was the taste of the old grandfather handed on; the black spot had become a patch, and was still growing. He tried to do without it; he struggled, but the pain and depression came on, and with it an invitation to dine and those kindly, mocking words, "We will have the old brandy. Mr Spiller prefers the old brandy."

So easily there comes a time when some ruling passion cannot be fought against, when even the desire to resist it cannot be found. The inclinations must be indulged. Even if the thing desired is small and contemptible, it must be enjoyed. A philosopher may be half-mad for a pinch of snuff, and so entirely a slave to his little master that his mind will not work without it. He has it, and like a child stops crying; and soon must have it again. Not the act, but those damnable repetitions, make the slave.

Outside the fir-wood, a few steps back from the track which was neither road nor lane, and with its stones was hostile to all traffic, opposite the half-hidden foot-bridge leading across the stream, which spoke so glibly to the wood as it ran through in a hurry to be made a river, was a single copper-beech, and upon its lew side Edith had carved a single short straight line. It was the beginning of a square, and it was a help to her. So queerly do minds seek for a stimulant; to one a wooden cross, to another a brandy bottle, and to a third some toy as aids to strength. "You must be strong," said Edith to that other self every day, "or you will never finish the square." The second side was to be added when she was happy; the third when she was married, and the figure would be perfected

by the birth of a son. Matrimony and motherhood meant everything to Edith; and a son, a strong youth who would strangle snakes—that was her ambition. It was idolatry in perfection.

The second side had not been added. Edith shrank, for she had not been settled in her mind, not even after that day in Godbeer, and the sign of her happiness when carved upon that tree would make the picture of a gallows. The second and third sides must be added together; and if not, then let the tree die.

Edith was not demonstrative. She was no girl to shed kisses like poppy-seed, thousands in one head and half of them barren, nor did she rattle like the brook. Her words and deeds were serious. All that she gave, her glances, smiles, her sighs were good, for they had meaning, they were selected from her garden. As she stood there beneath the copper-beech, small, erect, looking into the fantastic world of wine-red leaves sadly with all the beauty of sadness, she was like a stranger alone, anxious to be told of the people of this land in which she found herself. What would they do? Would they sacrifice her to their fierce gods, or would they give her the one thing which includes all, the one shy thing which lives among the rocks and is not often found because men flee from the rocks and keep them out of sight?

Gerard saw Edith in the wood and hid himself. He had written her a wild letter the day before and was ashamed to stand before her knowing she had read it. Easy enough to go away and write, but hard to stand and confess with those eyes searching for the truth. The letter-writer is by instinct a coward.

Their love at the beginning had been cold, a penitential kind of passion, for Edith was reserved and Gerard was afraid of her. She was in the way of the world above him, if not much, for he had grown higher and she had come down. It was her height in the way of heaven that kept him back. She was too spiritual, too free from grossness; she uplifted the soul

and did not enkindle the body, she seemed cold; her presence shed mystic moonlight rather than the scorching sun of lovers. That little playfulness which seems in courtship to be essential was not hers, or at least she would not show it until the time of seriousness was over. Her hair was straight and smooth, there were no curls about her ears; and a wide, pure forehead and a lack of curls suggest the saint who judges others harshly, and must do so because her own morality is high.

All that was changed on the one side. Secret living and the sins of solitude make every mouse a ghost. A greater fear drives out the less. Gerard was of necessity somewhat narrow-minded; his books had been those which were required for his advancement, added to a few dull classics which could not stimulate the imagination. Mark had done that. Coming out of the dark unexpectedly he had terrified Gerard with his suggestion of terror. It was the subject always in his mind, greater than life, death or doctrine. He could not define this terror, did not attempt it; others might have called it damnation, but to Mark it was more than that. He called it simply that other thing or something else. It had something to do with those evening voices across the plats, but Old Will heard them and was not frightened. It had something to do with the cloudy sign, but not much. It had something to do with death and was not death.

There was not a sound in the wood, but Edith, looking up suddenly, saw a man running towards her looking back as if in fear of his life. Moss was deep beneath those trees, muffling his footfalls.

"I shall never finish the square," said Edith; and the water, rattling below, rolled the smooth pebbles down as if to stone her.

"Edith—who is there?"

"I have seen nobody," she answered quietly. "I have walked in this wood for years and have never seen anyone except once."

"I saw nobody, but I felt it."

"Gerard," she said quietly, "if you are frightened here you are a coward."

He had not changed much, but his eyes were heavy as if he had just woke up and had not shaken off the bad dream of the morning; and his breathing was irregular and he kept on placing a hand to the side of his head. "I was lying under a rock and I felt something crawl over me—something cold. Edith, say something kind to me. Don't look at me like that."

She, too, was something cold. She could not help it. Other girls might have smiled, and been soothing, but Edith drew back, would not let him touch her, and the shadows beneath her eyes came out again. She would not absolve until there had been repentance and penance; and even then she could not have forgotten. A tender plant cannot withstand the frost.

"Why did you write that terrible letter?"

In the silence the wood seemed to be crowded with the population of a great city; wind and stream made the traffic, the hum of insects became sordid and commercial, the butterflies appeared to pass with a noise of whips; and the creaking of big branches made the sorrows of the crowd.

Gerard gave way, revealed himself, became weak and natural, went mad. "My beloved, my adored, my angel of light." Seizing her hands he pressed them to his face, hiding his eyes with them, holding them tightly to feel their refreshing strength and the coolness of those small fingers. "My beloved is mine and I am hers," he muttered in the same wild way. "I am here to worship her, to give my soul, to burn it as incense before her."

She drew her hands away with a quick movement, leaving his face naked like a new-born thing. "Not my body, Edith, but my soul," he was crying. "Take that. It has done nothing; it is not mine, it is yours. My body is full of wickedness. Let it go, let it be buried and damned, and let me kiss you with the kisses of the soul. You have no body either. You have angels' eyes." He went to the ground

before her in an agony of terror, sought her feet because they had no eyes, believing she would not reject him with them, searching for the little shoes which were invisible because the deep moss had swallowed them up; and then like a dog he tore up the moss until he found them beautiful and earth-scented like two small gardens of herbs.

"I know everything now," said Edith, trembling all over. "I would not believe—but those letters! And I have spoken to Mr Vivian."

Gerard was beside himself, unable to plead, not hearing, for his senses were like flies in a web, deprived of flight, and he knew nothing except that the light of life was receding, that the only light was being taken away; and that made him mad and kiss those shoes and cry, "Touch me, heal me, put your hand upon me. Let me feel your hand or I shall lose myself. I must be near you, I am not near enough, you are too good. Oh merciful God," he prayed, "blow upon my beloved, my Edith, the garden of my soul, that her love may flow out and comfort me, that I may hide myself in it and escape."

"You must get up. I cannot have you at my feet. Listen, Gerard! I loved you; the first time I saw you I felt what I had not felt for anyone else. You were like my father, spoke like him, acted like him. What he hated you professed to hate—and I was happy. Stand up, Gerard."

She forced him up.

"Answer me. Stand up alone; I cannot touch you—you —drunkard."

He stood and shook his head blindly, until his brain cleared a little, and he could see and understand that if he could not explain he was lost.

"No," he said in a strong, terrified voice, as if he had been speaking to a judge; "I am not a drunkard. I made an oath never to touch strong drink. One night I broke it, but I tried to keep it; I was broken down by a stronger will. I struggled, but it was like iron. It held me down."

"I forgave you—as well as I could."

Gerard put a hand to his head, and said simply, "I am in pain, Edith."

She trembled, and said quietly, "So am I."

"Forgive me again."

"How many times?"

"It is the pain that comes on at night—and the loneliness of my room. I don't seem able to think or speak, unless—unless——"

"This is awful!" she whispered. "I should be false to my father and myself."

"It is medicine," he muttered.

"Don't say that. It is the lowest weakness of all, to sin because you think it does you good. Gerard," she murmured, with a little shuddder, "good-bye."

Like Mark accepting Patience she was to lose her life, to return to servitude and Mrs Allen; but the act of Mark was better, for he was sacrificing, while she was saving, self; and yet with Edith love was something fixed, nothing could cut it out, so she too was sacrificing.

When Gerard perceived that she was drawing from her finger the ring which he had given her, he broke down again, and frightened her because she feared he might do himself some harm.

"I will make the oath again—to you. It shall never be broken. I have broken an oath made to God," he cried, becoming blasphemous in his terror, "but not to you. I cannot lose you; I will suffer anything. I can."

He forced his right hand into some brambles, moved it about among the thorns, brought it out bleeding; stained his handkerchief and forced it upon her. "I have signed," he said. "Edith, I can be strong."

She held out the ring, yet hesitated, for she loved it, and was afraid he might throw it into the stream. The sight of that copper-beech, one red bunch of it, was almost breaking her heart. Edith had a right to her dream, for the hand which she extended had not yet been filled with gifts.

"Had it been anything else," she murmured.

"This once," he prayed; "if you throw down that ring you throw away my soul."

"Will you never?" she faltered.

He burst into a passionate torrent of oaths.

"I cannot bear this," she said. "Come with me."

He followed her to the beech-tree. About a foot from the ground was a cleft in the trunk, and into this she forced the ring and covered the opening with a handful of clay.

"Nobody will find it," she said. "Upon this day next year you shall meet me here again. You shall not see or speak to me until then. But I shall think of you," she said softly. "If you can tell me then you have stood up like a man and been strong, I am yours. If not—why, then I shall know I am not worth winning."

Gerard looked at this quiet, cold girl, and the foolish tears were running down his cheeks. "It is too hard for me, Edith."

"Not Edith now," she answered, frowning. "I must make it hard for you. Will not the victory," she added, with her first smile, "be all the greater? Good-bye."

She went in time to prevent him seeing that she too was breaking down.

CHAPTER XIII

ABOUT AN AGONY OF THE COTTAGE

A CART wobbled up the sour-apple lane, bringing Patience home. Old Coles led the pony, Mark walked some distance in front, and the girl sat among the rags, crushed, half-crying, but dressed like a lady still. That was her consolation; Temperance hadn't got such clothes, therefore she was better off than her sister. Mark kept and looked away from her, and when she spoke he answered shortly. As for Old Coles, he walked with some alacrity. His mind was as dim as his eyes; but the little maid remained a clear memory, and he thought he had her in the cart and ought to be taking her home instead of along Love Lane.

Opposite Blue Violet, Mark looked up; but Temperance did not appear, which was surprising, for a cart passing was an event to bring her out. It so happened that the well was dry, and Temperance had to walk to the nearest spring. Patience also looked up and saw a child playing with a cat. She did not change colour; she simply sat and stared as if she had never seen the place before; then she called to Mark and asked, "How many have Tempy got?"

"None," he answered, without turning his head.

"Whose is that?" she called.

"Yours," he said.

There was a short silence before she muttered, "You liar"; but Mark took no heed, and Old Coles did not hear, and the child went on playing. When the cart had gone by, Patience was still looking back and murmuring to herself, "Little deary, I love children."

"We can walk up the lane. It's bad for the cart," said Mark to his partner. "Wait here for us. I shall bring her back, I reckon."

Since Mark and Patience had last walked in Love Lane, both had seen the world; he had worked, and she had played. Very much had been gained by him and lost by her since the young hind with the bundle on his shoulder had met the young girl with Tibby the lamb; and now all he had gained was to be added to her losses.

"Fancy me and you being here again," said Patience. Anyone might have thought she was returning home with an excellent character and plenty of well-earned money, and no one could have dreamed that only a few hours back she had been fighting her companion with teeth and nails. "Seems like old times, walking down Love Lane. We have changed a lot, haven't we, Mark? You've been and educated yourself, and I talk like a lady, and I got fine clothes. I reckon we haven't done so bad. What the devil did you want to say that kid was mine for?" she said, beginning to be fierce again. "You'll spoil my character."

Mark went on ahead; the lane was too narrow to walk abreast unless they had been lovers. A sweet pale face was in his memory, and he looked up mentally to that. Even a foolish knight is not to be mocked at for his worship of a Dulcinea, when that worship helps him to stand square; and that knight who tilts at windmills is doing better than he who sits in the cellar; for when madness and folly reach the upper house, folly may be startled to behold the madman crowned.

"You will have to tell me everything," said Mark. There was no hurry. He did not want to hear.

"Does the preaching pay? How much do you get a week?" she went on.

"Nothing."

"How are you to live then? If I'm going to marry I'll be a lady. This costume cost six guineas, and I won't wear anything less, and if you give me any cloam to wash I shall chuck the lot out of the window."

"I've made you a promise, and I'll keep it," Mark answered.

"I shall want a servant. I'm not going to do any dirty work," said this little prostitute. "And a pony and cart. I must live somewhere where I can see plenty passing the window. I'm not a bad girl, really. I can't be, because I'm fond of children."

Mark said nothing. They were near the last bend and the steep plunge down to the rocky court where Barseba would be working her life away.

"I shall want some money soon," went on the maddening voice. "I've only got a shilling or two, and you tore my things fearful last night when you got so cross. You must give me a nice ring with real diamonds in it, won't you, deary?" she begged in wheedling tones. "Mine are only old stage stuff, and, of course, I can't wear them now."

"There's your mother," said Mark. They were round the bend and could see Barseba at the pump.

"My! ain't she dirty!" exclaimed Patience. "I wonder if she'll want to shake hands."

Barseba looked up when the gate slammed, shading her eyes, and wondered when she recognised Mark with a young lady. Patience looked like one at a distance. She stood, the wind blowing her white hair about, and the brown water dripping from her hands, calling, "Master! Mark ha' got a surprise vor we."

Caleb was not well. Those robbers were frightening the life out of him. He was sitting at the hearth, warming himself in the smoke, preferring the sooty atmosphere to the sun outside, smoking a huge pipe, or rather sucking at its stem, and upon his knees was a newspaper which he was pretending to read and tearing into shreds, lighting them one by one and conveying the flame to the bowl of his pipe, smoking fire and fumes of burnt paper which did not cost so much as tobacco. He put his head to one side when Barseba called and said he should be glad to have Mark Yeo with him.

"My dear life!" screamed Patience, for the old turkey was

upon her, beak, claws, and feathers, for bell, book, and candle, excommunicating her viciously. "Get home, you old devil!" she cried; but the fowl had conscience and duty to think of and would not be appeased. All women he hated, and this one was exceeding vile. As Mark drove him off he seemed to groan and to mutter, "Is Mark Yeo also among the women?"

Barseba had gone inside to make herself tidy. She heard the scream, looked out, and became uneasy in her mind.

"Master," she muttered, "I don't like them clothes. I ha' got fine clothes tu, but I don't ever wear 'em."

Those clothes were hidden away somewhere, possibly in a chest, moth-eaten, and, if whole, antique; but for her life Barseba could not have laid her hand upon them.

"Who be her?" asked Caleb.

"Our maiden."

Barseba made a quick movement towards the dresser, seized the old Bible, held it to her bosom as a charm against the evil power of mathematics. "Silk," she muttered. "Silk on a Saturday."

Mark pushed Patience forward, telling her to go in alone, feeling that it was not for him to be present at that meeting; and the girl obeyed, too callous to feel much, and went in with mincing step like a squire's lady visiting tenants, lifting her fine skirts and her nose; and so entered with a stupid laugh and a vigorous, "Hello, folks!"

The door was shut, and Mark went back into the court. When he turned the blind had been drawn, and there was silence in the farmhouse.

What happened in the old living-room, which had seen the coming in of life and the passing out of death for nearly three centuries, he did not know, but could guess that Barseba would play the leading part. Caleb would not worry much when he was convinced Patience had not come to rob him. Honest Barseba would be holding out her hands, telling her daughter to hold out hers, that her God and her Bible might

judge between them, between the white hands and the hard hands, as between the sheep and the goats. Barseba, who had done nothing but work since leaving the school which had taught her nothing, who by continual labour had almost ceased to be a woman, and had become, so far as the farm was concerned, a force like the sun, an element like the rain, a machine like the plough; Barseba, with the earth upon her and the old clothes which would see her out, with hardly the time for words, because deeds were waiting, calves had to be fed, young turkeys collected, cows brought home, and a hundred other things before the day was snuffed out—she would be wanting to know how a daughter of hers had spent those years, asking to see the talents, demanding the meaning of silk upon a work-day, hands with no labour marks, and all the signs of pleasure which were vice. What is there but work, if one is honest? And those who do no work must be dishonest; even if wealthy, they are dishonest to themselves, the earth, and Nature. To those who work all pleasure is reward; to the idle it is a vice. Fine clothes upon the body, no money in the purse, no good report, no character, only a certain ugly prettiness. Barseba could not fail to hit.

There were sounds at last: a young girl cursing her father and her mother; and the old priest-turkey stood upon one leg, and said in his own monastic way, "Poverty, chastity, and obedience. She has missed them all."

Mark drew near, and the door was flung open. Patience came out like a spirit of evil exorcised.

"They won't have me. Mother tells me to go to the devil —just because I've been a little lively. Tell her, Mark, you're going to make me honest."

Marriage absolved the past. Matrimonial regeneration washed the soul whiter than any waters of baptism. Mrs Yeo could be as she liked, but Patience Starke was a leper. Marriage would remove the white sheet from under her feet and wrap it round her body as a chrisom. Such is the law, all-powerful, because man made it. The married woman is

forgiven every sin. God must not meddle with any man-made law.

Mark entered. Old Barseba was standing against the dresser holding the big Bible to her heart. The date of her daughter's birth was recorded within it. Caleb sat in the smoke playing with his pipe. Mark stood upon the stones and said, "I'm going to marry the girl."

Barseba made a step forward. The white head was shaking violently, and the withered face was scarlet. "Yew b'ain't. Us wun't let ye. Aw, b'ain't I a woman yet?" she cried. "Don't I see yew hates the strumpet, Mark Yeo?"

"No, mother. I don't hate her," he said.

"Tak' the old Buke. Put him to your heart and look me in the eyes and say yew loves the wench——"

"I'll marry the maiden," he said.

"Maiden!" shouted Barseba, spitting on the stones. "That vor she and the likes o' she!"

"Take her back, mother."

"Not if she wur starving. I'd throw her bread through the window, and tell she go eat it wi' the pigs. Master!" cried Barseba, rising up against Caleb, "she'm yourn. Tempy be mine."

Caleb did not care. He was thinking of his "tetties," and making up his mind to climb into the barn and count them that he might be sure the rats and jackdaws had not made away with any.

"Patty is young," Mark went on. "She must have her chance. When we were little children I promised to marry her. When she told me she was going to Plymouth I asked her to marry me. And now I have brought her back under the promise that I will. If I break my word she will go back."

"Let her go," said Barseba. "If her can live on dirt, feed her on dirt."

"She would never come back."

"Who wants she?"

"I reckon there is some one in that book who wants her," he said bluntly.

"It be the devil, then," Barseba shouted, past all charity. "Let him have she. I say, though she'm his daughter," pointing to the indifferent figure in the smoke, "I say she ha' got the mark of hell upon her, and I hopes she'll go there, as I hopes to go to heaven myself. Vor what be the gude o' working and keeping honest if such as she be tooken into heaven and set down beside ye?"

Before Mark could make an answer to this terrible speech he was pushed aside and Patience passed him. Without a word, but half-crying, she hurried to the hearth and seized the great bellows. Barseba rushed forward, the girl eluded her, reached the table and flung the bellows upon it. Then she made for the door screaming, while Barseba broke down and sobbed, and even old Caleb awoke and began to shiver.

"Don't worry about old superstitions," said Mark.

"The curse be on who touches mun, and that be me," wailed Barseba.

"Let it be on me," said Mark; and he raised the bellows and put them back in their place beside the hearth.

Temperance was home digging a piece of ground in which she proposed to grow flowers. She had fantastic notions, and when she had mentioned to Timothy a desire for more flowers he thought her mad. Still, there was plenty of rough ground about the cottage; not all the space was required for a garden, by which was meant the growing of vegetables, and she was welcome to clear a portion for her own amusement. Indeed, he was prepared to assist, for he was not a bad husband when sober, and his unkindest critic could not have called him a poor workman. Temperance looked up, hearing footsteps, and saw her sister.

"Well, dear," said Patience, and kissed her.

"So yew ha' come back home," said Temperance.

"They won't have me home."

"All right," said the elder sister. "Yew'm welcome, Patty."

She walked heavily down the path with her curious ungainly slouch, and out at the gate where Old Coles and Mark were waiting by the cart. The box was taken out and carried up to the cottage.

"Me and Mark are going to get married. I reckon 'tis time for me to settle down," said Patience, as cheerfully as if no unpleasant incident had ever taken place. "You'll come and see me to-morrow, deary? Sunday evening—we must go for a walk."

"I'll come if I can," said Mark, looking at Temperance. "Good night," he said shortly.

"My dear soul! Ain't you going to cuddle me a bit?" cried Patience. She was still the same. If there was any sort of man handy she must have her kisses. Men were made for such things, not for work or problems; merely to hug and fondle stupid creatures who would not think.

Temperance turned and went back up the path, and Mark called after her, "Will Timothy mind?"

"Not if I wants Patty here. My husband is a gude man," she answered stoutly; and then she went in to make some sort of a sleeping-place for her sister, who had amused herself by picking a twig and was flicking Mark with it.

"I've got nothing to do. I'll walk to the end of the lane with you," she said.

There he had to kiss her, and discover what a bitter thing a kiss can be. As for Patience, any kiss was the same to her. "Come to-morrow," she called after him. "If you don't, I shall walk out with another fellow."

Timothy Mosscrop was not concerned about the arrival of Patience that evening, because it was Saturday, and the time for worshipping strange gods. He became indeed aware of a young woman's presence in the house, but only dimly, as a beetle might know of the cook's presence in the kitchen. He did not refer to her, lest he should be making a mistake, and his wife would think he was drunk. Timothy was never drunk, and the only time he lost his temper was when Temperance

told him he had been drinking. It was the one insult he could not endure.

Yet Timothy was a good husband, and regarded in a district which looked upon drunkenness merely as a form of sport, or, at its worst, as a kind of missing link between virtue and vice, as an honest and a sober man. He was not intemperate certainly, as he only got drunk once a week: very different from Joseph Boone, who lived and slept and had his being in the fumes. It was expensive, because Timothy was generous in the lion's den, though from that very cause he was forced to be niggardly at home. His master gave him an excellent character, and he deserved it, being a fine workman. His energies indeed appeared inexhaustible; out very early, at work all day, with the exception of a hurried hour for dinner, then home to take off his coat again, dig his own garden, sow, reap, uproot rocks, build a hedge, until and after dark. He did a day's work after his day's work was done. He was a good example of the enormous possibilities of manual labour. Had his intellect been equal to his physical powers, had he been a philosopher, he would have written many a work worth having—and yet he was spoilt.

Timothy Mosscrop was very little use because of those Saturday nights. It was not enough to dig splendidly, to be untiring—a machine could have beaten him there—and not to know, nor even to think of the duty of man; not to put by a penny for days of famine; not to consider the future, his wife, sickness, clothes; not to think of anything at all. And yet it was not Timothy's fault. He was the victim of a system which teaches a man nothing, except that he must not commit a murder and must not steal. He was the victim of convention, which winks at folly and says, "Let the man have his pleasure." It was true that Timothy had no pleasures, nor were any within his reach except that one, when he was staggering among the vegetables with a kind of imagination. It was the only pleasure, to join the congregation of those that gibbered and those that howled. What else could he do

on Saturday nights? Sitting with his wife was not pleasure. Besides, she was always busy; and if the work was done, how could they sit and stare at one another? A man must have pleasure, and if healthy forms of enjoyment are not forthcoming, he will take the bad, which somehow are always provided.

Sunday morning Timothy was himself again, and discovered that Patience was not a delusion. He showed his good heart at once by saying she was welcome; but Temperance did not tell him the whole story then, although, when Timothy found it out, it made no difference. Patience was seeking shelter under his roof until she should be married, and by all the laws of hospitality, as Timothy understood them, he could not drive her out. But he was sorry she was going to marry Mark Yeo.

"They be telling bad about he vor putting hisself above we and trying to mak' hisself a gentleman," he said. "Some of the chaps'll soon be getting nasty."

"Mark b'ain't proud. He'm as nice a young fellow as ever spoke," said Temperance.

"He'm taking tu much upon him," said Timothy. "The chaps don't mind what squire ses or what parson ses, but they b'ain't agwaine to be put upon by the likes o' Mark."

"It be the drunkards he'm down upon," she said.

"Let 'en mind his own business. Squire Vivian and parson ain't got nought to say, and be Mark Yeo better than they? He comes along wi' his funeral face and ses, 'Now then, yew chaps, let the liquor bide and get along home to the missis. Ought to be ashamed of yourselves,' he ses, 'sitting here and drinking.' The chaps ain't agwaine to stand much more on't, I tell ye. Mark Yeo b'ain't no gentleman, and none o' the Yeos ever ha' been gentlemen, so fur as I knows. Old Will be the like, 'cept that he keeps his mouth shut. Works upon his plats, then gets home. Nevers comes to sit wi' neighbours and tell his tale."

"Yew knows well enough they Yeos ha' never been like other volk," Temperance reminded him.

"They b'ain't no better than we," said Timothy stubbornly.

"Mark ought to work vor his living, 'stead o' setting volk one against t'other."

The doctrine of work came up again: going out early, ploughing, hedging, attending to sheep, then home to till the garden. It was the only work which Timothy could comprehend. Trying to make the lives of others brighter, bringing a light into the darkness of home life, teaching self-consciousness, sobriety, reproaching improvidence, seeking to arrest, if only in a small way, the progress of national decay—that was not work. It was playing the fool; it was impertinence; it was tampering with independence. Timothy was wise because he knew nothing. He obeyed the laws of the system and walked in the paths of great convention, and was respected by everyone that knew him.

The Sunday of convention was after this manner: Timothy rose as early as upon any other day, because he had the sheep to see to. Afterwards he washed his face and hands at the pump, put on his best trousers and black waistcoat, brushed his boots, rolled up his shirt-sleeves lest they should get soiled, and walked about the garden with a pipe in his mouth. The Mosscrops did not attend any place of worship, though Temperance liked the church because of the hymns and the organ, but she felt that her clothes were not good enough; while Timothy had a leaning towards the Bible Christians, but never attended their chapel because it was "not time yet." The spirit of unbelief had reached Timothy, though he was not aware of it, the old traditions of his race being strong enough to prevent the free-thought from becoming aggressive for another generation or two. Most of the morning he pottered about the garden, not working, nor venturing to think of work, for that would have been wicked, have broken the convention, and neighbours would have avoided him as a Sunday-breaker; but doing little jobs, slowly, gradually, with intervals of pipe-lighting and hands in pockets between each; cutting away brambles with his knife, breaking sticks with his hands, uprooting a weed here and there, clearing the wild convolvulus

from the peas, but very careful not to touch any implement of the week, any tool of labour, such as a pick or mattock. If Timothy had seen a neighbour digging his garden, he would have been shocked, and would probably have denounced him before the whole parish. No man could do such a thing and not be defiled.

At noon Timothy went and stood upon Dry Arch, obeying the system; while Temperance, who as a woman would not understand recreation, was amusing herself by cooking the dinner. There were cliques in Fursdon parish, as elsewhere: one knot of men assembled on Dry Arch, another at the stone-cutter's yard higher up the road, a third beneath the mine. The married men smoked and spat on the road, while the single men jeered each other and learnt new oaths. When a vehicle passed they stared until it was out of sight, and if a stranger went by on foot they became like sheep, every eye followed his movements, and every tongue asked who he might be, what he could be up to, had he ever been seen before, and was there any probability of his ever appearing again. So the time passed until the various parties broke up and sauntered home for the great event of the day, the Sunday dinner.

Custom ordained that no restraint should be placed upon appetite for this meal, therefore it was not until late in the afternoon that Timothy felt himself able to stir abroad. By then people were wandering aimlessly upon the big road. Lovers were taking their walks, pushing each other about and howling affectionately; young men wandered in groups, flourishing sticks; while their seniors looked over the hedges, regarding cows and sheep with dull eyes and speculative questions. No married women were to be seen, because they were shut up like queen-bees. They had the dinner things to wash, and they could not break the system by venturing outside in their working clothes. The unmarried girls had more freedom; but they, too, were victims of convention, and some of them had spent two hours in making themselves presentable for an hour's walk. There was nothing going on except smoking, a lot of

loose talk, and some lax love-making. The rector would have flung up his hands in horror had anyone proposed a game of cricket for the young men, and would have talked about continental methods, decay of religious sentiment, and a desecration of the day of rest.

Timothy strolled about until the church bells began, and then he brightened up, for the pleasant part of the day was coming. Attired in his black coat he joined a large assembly of men of all ages beside the tower who watched the church-goers passing. When the doors were shut, others were opening, and he went to his usual beer-house if he had any money left; if not, he went home, sat on the stairs looking out of the cottage door, and whistled until bed-time. Temperance would still be working. It was always a wonder to Timothy why she messed about so.

And yet Temperance was not happy, although she had a home, a good husband who was only a bad one once a week, and an excellent reputation. She had that imagination which made her want to grow flowers and have a garden where her mind as well as her feet could wander. Temperance had no business to own a mind, even if it was a little one, or rather, she had no right to discover that she owned one. The awakening had been caused possibly by some small incident years ago, something the schoolteacher had said, or something she had read about which had fallen into her like a seed, and, after lying latent for a time, had germinated. She was a barren woman, so far as children were concerned; but no soil can produce every kind of crop, and the body which contains an original mind is not the body which brings forth children. The body of Patience was fruitful soil, but the mind was of sand, producing those prickly things which grow in the desert. The body of Temperance was lichen-covered rock, but the mind was a field enriched by the matter falling each year from the growths within.

The arrival of Patience produced a kind of harvest. The sisters had long days together. It was natural that Patience

should show only the bright side of the life she had led, and Temperance listened with a kind of envy, and, being only a woman, gloated over the box of treasures which Patience had brought with her; nothing of any value, gaudy trinkets and cheap jewellery, though wonderful to Temperance; but the clothes—that was where the elder sister felt her weakness. She had never owned good clothes, and was never likely to possess any, and she knew it would be good to feel their comfort.

It was a wet day, and Patience, who was fond of her sister and helped her a little in the housework, suggested she should dress up, put on the fine clothes and the trinkets, and "be a lady" for the time being. Poor Temperance flushed and trembled. It was an awful and a pleasant thought; but to satisfy her conscience she had to make difficulties.

"I be taller than yew, Patty."

"That don't matter. You are no stouter."

"I be dirty," said Temperance.

"You can clean yourself."

So Temperance went to the pump and drew water. Then to the faggot-stack to get sticks. How weary she was of those two small walks, between pump and cottage, from the stack to the door! and now she was to have a holiday, real pleasure. She smiled at the splashing water, did not heed the pricking of the blackthorn. She was using her imagination, which carried her a certain distance, to the idea of a lady sauntering at her ease in her own flower-garden and no further, not to a consideration of the uses to which those clothes had been put, or the manner in which they had been procured. She was trembling with a warm excitement. What a difference it made to have some pleasure, how light the faggot seemed that day!

They went upstairs. The old ragged skirt was put off, and the great nailed boots, and Temperance washed as she had not done for years; and then the garments of great temptation were gradually assumed, the open-worked stockings, the fine linen and laces, the white-frilled petticoat, the silk dress, the dainty shoes; and Patience laughed about her, adding

bracelets, brooches, necklets, and all manner of baubles. "Now, I must do your hair," she cried, and Temperance sat, still shivering, thrilled all through with the touch of pleasure, scarcely daring to lay her hands upon her knees.

"Oh, my dear soul! Look, Tempy," cried the voice of vice.

A looking-glass was slanted before her, and Temperance saw, not herself, but the figure which her sister had made; and yet she was happy, fearfully happy, and when she turned and saw the dirty ragged skirt she would soon have to assume again—and for ever—she could have wept.

"It be lovely," she muttered.

"Nobody would know you. If you went into the village they would take you for a stranger. You only want some teeth, Tempy, and they don't cost much."

"Us can't afford such things," she said.

"You were always prettier than me. You would soon get pretty again if you had good food and nothing to do except enjoy yourself. Some teeth and clothes like these would set you up proper, Tempy."

Then it occurred to Temperance that Patience was far more excited than she was, and there was something beneath the excitement which was not healthy. She was satisfied, like a child let off her lessons; but there was in Patience's eyes something she had seen in the eyes of her husband when he came home on Saturday night.

"I must tak' 'em off. They'm tu fine vor me. I be a working woman," she said. "It be brave to wear 'em, Patty dear, but I must work."

"You are quite young, Tempy. We used to dance to Fursdon fair."

"I'll never dance again."

"You're only a girl. A little while, and you'd be so pretty. I should have no chance with you, but I'm not so cold as you are. Let's have a dance, Tempy."

More pleasure! It was rising in the veins of Temperance in the form of poison emanating from those clothes, which

seemed to cling like the robe of Deianeira steeped in the blood of Nessus about the body of Hercules, the garment which could only be wrenched off by tearing the body. She could not resist when Patience pulled her up, and they danced about the room, at first soberly, then excitedly, and at last with the fury of two Bacchantes, smiling, then laughing, and then screaming.

Patience fell back upon the bed, and another scream went up. She had forgotten the child was sleeping there. She rolled over, kissed and hugged it, calling it soft names in a hard voice, for she had other things to contemplate and a bigger game to play.

"Ah, my pet, dear love. Did mother wake it up?"

"She'm yourn, Patty," cried Temperance. "B'ain't she now?" Her own face was scarlet, her usually composed body was heaving, and her eyes were shining like the big raindrops hanging from the thatch. She was ready for more pleasure, more of that new wild life.

"No," said Patience.

"She'm like yew."

"I can't help it. She's not mine."

"Yew'm cruel fond o' the child."

"I love 'em all. I can love lots, but I hate my mother and the man I'm going to marry. I love everyone else," shouted Patience, jumping up, dancing about like a little fury, and dragging Temperance with her.

She was lying, her sister knew it; but Patience was a natural liar and had no sense of shame. During the days she had been in service, if her mistress asked where she had been for her walk, Patience would reply with a lie; even when there was no reason for keeping back the truth she would tell a lie, because it was easier to her somehow than the truth.

"Tempy," she cried, seeing that her sister was in the mood for anything. "Let's go for a walk."

"A walk!" exclaimed Temperance. "Why, 'tis raining cruel."

"A long walk!" said Patience. "To the station."

"Whatever be yew telling? Here, Patty, I must get these clothes off and set about work. The fire will be going out."

"You have done plenty of work,' said Patience, holding her sister's hard hands, swinging her arms to and fro. "Let's go, Tempy."

Still her sister did not understand.

"Tempy, it's jolly," cried the tempter passionately. "Plenty to eat and drink, no work, get up when you like, it's all holiday. You go out in the evening, and the shops are all lighted up, and even if you are a bit short of money—it's jolly, Tempy."

"What be yew telling?" muttered the other.

"It's a bit dull by oneself; but me and you together could have a big time. I can't settle down, Tempy; this sort of quiet life would kill me, and I don't want to marry Mark. He's not my sort, and we should always be fighting. I know it would make me respectable, but what's the good of it? Being respectable don't make you happy. You are awful respectable, Tempy, but what's it done for you? I reckon you've got nothing left here but to die respectably—and you're young, Tempy," said Patience, with a shrill laugh.

"Patty, don't ye, my dear. Don't ye now," pleaded poor Temperance, trying to release her hands that she might remove those trinkets from her neck.

"Keep those things on. I'll give you the lot. Come on, Tempy," said Patience, her voice falling to a whisper. "There's not a soul about, and Timothy won't be home for two hours yet. We can slip out and go, just disappear. Dirty old Fursdon will never hear of us again. We can get across by the fields, nobody would know you in these clothes, and it don't matter about me. Tempy, come on. We'll go to London. A lot of girls told me it knocks Plymouth hollow; and there's lots of money there, Tempy, and you'll soon get so pretty, Tempy dear. I've got just enough to take us there. It's no use going to Plymouth, for Mark would come and find us. He means to make a Methody of me somehow. Tempy dear, we can get to London by midnight. It's so lovely when the streets are bright, and people come from the theatres—

they speak to you, deary, real gentlemen like Squire Vivian—and no work, Tempy, no more work."

Temperance broke from her suddenly and went to the window in her fine apparel, her mind working like a butterfly bursting from its caterpillar's grave to its short and joyous resurrection. She had an imagination, and it did not necessarily incline always towards what was good; the evil was included too, for the mind which thinks embraces everything, and the evil thoughts, too ripe and luscious, are often uppermost. Her poor thin face was in a sweat. She was young; she could be pretty again. A month of happy living would make a merry girl of her, give her back those years which Timothy had eaten, restore the freshness and the bloom of life. She knew nothing about the dark side of that life towards which Patience was tempting her; she believed it was in truth all pleasure, and that belief was added to her pain.

"Tempy, come on."

She looked out; saw the raindrops splashing, the sloppy garden, the miserable cabbage-stalks; the pump which was part of her captivity, the black and dripping wood-stack which was another part; and in front the dreary field where it was a wonder to see a man walk; and, beyond, the heaving moor and ragged tors in rain-mists. She thought of the sad cottage, endless drudgery without pleasure or holiday, her lost teeth, those Saturday nights, the silence, the loneliness of the long days, the apparent injustice of it all.

"Tempy, come on," screamed Patience hysterically.

There was a muffled sound through the rain. It was a clock striking in the tower of the church a mile away; and inside that building she had stood, looking at a stained-glass window, and had said—

"Here! Tak' this old trade off," she cried fiercely, snapping the chain round her neck, pulling the clothes off, pushing her sobbing, shrieking sister away from her. "I be a decent woman and a wife. I ha' promised to du my duty by mun, and I will. Give me my old clothes again."

CHAPTER XIV

ABOUT THE WALL-BUILDERS

WHAT more fascinating work is there than wall-building? It is congenial to every man, human instinct is in favour of it; each individual has it in him or her to build one wall. It was the first art, and fear must have found it out. The savage, afraid of his big rough neighbour, would have hidden behind a rock, and when there was no rock handy he would search for one; and perhaps it was not large enough, so he put another on top of it, and then another, until he screamed for joy at discovering a new thing; and that was a wall.

Some of them, the lowland walls, are made of mud and straw, a yard in width, and in almost as good a condition now as when the sun dried them, showing that savages knew how to work, or that the world is still in its infancy. Those of the moor are made of rough stones piled one upon the other, often so cunningly that the light cannot force its way through; and the modern builders of these were in mist-land alone with the granite, high-priests of their cult; but they were builders like the men of old time, and their walls were so like those of the savages that no man could say, "This was built by Will Yeo, this by Job Lithern, and this by the hairy ones." Custom holds all time together, and a simple deed shows how short the time is and how strong the chain. The first men are only a little time away, upon the other side of the wall. There is the flint implement just as the labourer dropped it; he has only gone to dinner, and will be back presently. Will and Job could have talked to them, perhaps, and they could have

worked side by side, understanding each other because they would be doing the same work. Only the hairy man might have said after a time, "Tak' my tool, will ye, and let me use yours."

Will and Job had spent their lives building walls of simplicity, stone upon stone. This was the method: the tools required were the hammer, with one edge blunt, the other keen, and the iron bar for shifting. First, a double row of large rocks, all glittering with mica and seams of quartz where the cleavages were fresh, and then the smaller stones, flat or round it did not matter, but if there were any sharp projecting points a blow or two of the keen edge knocked them off; there was a space left between the two rows, and into this the small stones and granite chips were poured and beaten down with the blunt edge; then more large rocks, the bigger the better, placed cunningly so as to secure the ends of those beneath; it was easy, they seemed to fit naturally, and if not the hammer trimmed them. A few handfuls of turf filled up the chinks, but only the greater architects made use of such; and these placed turf also upon the top of the wall in order that there might be grass and flowers in their season. Will and Job knew that was unnecessary, for Nature would look after the decoration of the wall, and the wind would blow soil into the crevices, and the soil would bring forth foxgloves. It was astonishing how quickly the wall could be built, and there it would stand until the sun went out, unless other savages came and knocked it down.

It did not enter into the philosophy of Will and Job that they were not alone in the work, that all other men built walls, some using money-bags, others penny-an-hour bodies of victims instead of stones, and substituting for hammer and bar selfishness and tyranny; and those others, again, who built their walls with the mud and straw of pride and ambition; and the great congregation of those who built with lies, the wall of the good-intent lie raised by the churchman, the wall of the ill-intent lie erected by the money-seeker, the wall of the indifferent lie built by the statesman, some using the keen edge, others the blunt

edge, and others the iron bar; and still another class, the profound builders, who raised their walls, not for money nor yet to satisfy ambition, but for the good of all, the thinker, the scientist, wielding the keen edge while others were dancing, slowly, thoughtfully fitting each stone into place; and these cannot escape from the wall, they have no dinner-hour, no Sunday, and even when they try to rest the hammer goes on trimming, the iron bar goes on shifting; and the sadness of their work is they cannot finish, and their walls are like a ruin when they leave.

The plats of Will and Job were some distance apart, but they saw each other often. Will did not cross to visit the deaf man, but Job would come to bellow across his neighbour's wall. They were both simple; but Will's simplicity was complex, troubled with mysticism, and penetrated by romance. There were voices in the wind for Will and fairy-stories in the rivers, but they only came to him through the long shadows of evening. Job was elementary; he was a creature of the rocks, one of the queer things which live under them, a man reversed; his ancestry had to be looked for among strange types. He was one of those beings who rebelled against being made like a man, and spent his life trying to struggle back to his own species underneath the stones. He was a kindly animal, full of affection for those who treated him properly and did not tresspass upon his plats; towards these he jumped as it were, bounded around them with his strange noises as if he would have licked their hands; at others he growled and made as though he would bite and worry them.

Job had tried to do his duty. He had a cottage down in Fursdon, married, brought up a family, the members of which were more or less strangers to him, because he was always up on the moor taking in the plats. That was his real home. What happiness he was capable of came to him while he swung the hammer and cleft the rocks. He could not understand the ways of civilisation, and, though he tried to conform to the system, he failed. Then his wife died, and the children whom

he did not know were scattered and he was free. What was the use of descending to Fursdon every night and climbing back in the morning? He only went down to sleep, to rest from the wall-building, and he could sleep as well upon the plats. He had built a shed in which to keep his tools and little cart; and one night, when darkness came on too early, he cut heather and fern, half-filled the cart, and upon that bed he slept. The next morning he went down to Fursdon, brought up from the cottage all that he could require, a mattress, some cloam, a few cooking utensils. Some folk will declare he did not even take the mattress. The rest of the things and the cottage he sold. The shed became his home, in the cart he slept, upon the plats he lived; and passed into a state of dirt and degradation shameful to civilisation, but at the same time proclaiming to it how artificial a thing it was.

It was all against Job Lithern that the words he uttered were meaningless sounds. He had become angry when, as he thought, people would not understand him, and, thinking it was because he did not speak loud enough, he shouted and yelled whenever he opened his mouth, trying to make himself understood and hearing nothing himself. His deafness had made him fearfully and noisily dumb; and yet Old Will seemed to understand.

Will himself did not find it easy to talk; those years of solitude had rubbed rust upon his tongue. When he spoke he first straightened himself, as if about to give a military salute, and then he spoke a few words quickly, as if afraid of forgetting what he had to say. Some blows of the hammer, and then he would straighten himself again and deliver the fresh words as they had been revealed to him.

Job's fearful face gesticulated over the wall and his hand waved towards a cleft in the moor, where the clouds were piling Pelion upon Ossa. A sound was proceeding from the cleft, and Job guessed as much, though he could not hear it; but Will had been listening all day, and now that it was evening he intercepted it.

"Gude weather," he said. "It ha' been vull and mucky tu long. Us be agwaine to get sunshine now."

Job laughed fearfully, and made a pantomime of himself. Anyone might have thought he was threatening to climb the wall and strangle Old Will, when he was only being pleasant in his own way and striving to ask what the other wall-builder heard.

"The watter be soft," said Will. "He be like one o' they little birds a-singing up to heaven along."

It was the sound of the brook that he heard, which had a different voice to him for every weather. The brook was his barometer, and it never failed. No untrained ear could have detected any difference in the sound of the water, except that it was louder after rain than before, but its finer notes were audible to Will. He knew when it was merry "up over" and when sad; when the storm was coming and the spell of fine weather was at hand. The harsh and crude noises he left to commoner ears. Anyone could read the message of the swoollen torrent and could distinguish the meaning of that solemn winter sound, when it seemed as if the world was breaking. That was not the water alone. The thunder was made by the boulders grinding along with a ton of torrent behind each. It was only the fine ears which could know when the tiny golden pebbles were being rolled over and over.

Two figures came over the moor as the sun went down, and Job Lithern escaped to his own fortified walls with one more bellow, which meant, "Good-night"; while Old Will, shading his eyes to look over before spitting into the hollow of his hands, and seizing the hammer again, recognised his son and Gerard Spiller.

Since that afternoon in the wood Gerard had sought Mark's company through fear of being alone, with the feeling that Mark was stronger than himself; and this was bad for them both. Bad for Gerard, because it angered the rector and also lowered him in the sight of church-admiring farmers; bad for Mark, because the villagers thought he was striving to set

himself still more above them. Gerard was an habitual letter-writer; it was almost a vice with him; and, as he might no longer write to Edith, he had written to Mark telling him everything, even exaggerating, like a lover declaring himself unworthy of his lady. Mark came to visit him. There was a scene, a tempest, almost a fight; for Mark had lost his temper entirely, and had cursed Gerard. At times he exalted himself unduly, and felt no compassion for others; but the mood did not last. He came next day, and was sorry; forgave, and was forgiven; and that quarrel seemed a rivet to their friendship.

"I must speak to my father," said Mark; and Gerard followed slowly, wishing he could find upon the moor that thing which had uplifted his companion.

"Mark," said Old Will, straightening himself, "what ha' yew been doing?"

"Little enough, father."

"Look what I ha' done," said Will. "I'll finish avore I dies. I know what 'tis," he said shrewdly. "The stoanes wun't lift. Tak' the jumper to 'em, Mark; tak' the tears and feathers. Yew mun tear thikky avore yew can lift mun."

"How are you keeping, father?"

"Seventy-five next birthday, and I be lusty yet. Yew couldn't lift thikky," said Will, pointing to a rock. "But I could, aw, and I will avore dark. Mark, come over."

There was no apparent reason for the command, as they were standing alone, but Old Will stepped back as if he feared listeners, and Mark followed him. The remark was only made as a hint that there was something to follow.

"Annie heard some o' they drunkards telling about yew. Mun show Mark Yeo his place, they ses. He don't know it. Us mun show 'en, they ses. They wur stood in the road to Freezabeer, and Annie wur stood behind they christening-bushes. Yew knaws where I mean, Mark, corner o' the orchard, where her has tilled they vunny little rackler-posies."

Mark understood that his father meant Annie had been

standing between the chrysanthemums and the auriculas, only those words were too great for Will.

"I know they are talking," he said. "What of it?"

"There be some rough lads in Fursdon, and there be greasy ones, and I reckon the greasy be the worst. I can get hold of a stoane when he be rough, but I can't when he be greasy," said Will. "Mind George Vid, vor he'm to the bottom on't. He ha' been going from cottage to cottage telling to the volk about yew. When God made grease he warn't fur away."

Mark felt uncomfortable. He was afraid of that round, rolling body and the great red, white-whiskered face; the unction of George Vid was a thing beyond him.

"There be another thing, Mark, now I be telling," Old Will went on. "'Tis Annie. Her mun get married. Her be teasing I," he added.

"What! You and Annie having rows!" Mark exclaimed.

"Mebbe I be getting old, and likes to be let bide, like Job. Her ses I be catankerous, there be no pleasing I, and her said last night I wur so peevish her could almost spare I."

"There have been changes since I left," Mark muttered; and it was true, for Old Will was gathering the windy mantle of the moor closely round him and was making himself unfitted for a woman's care The time had come when he could not understand his daughter; she was thirty, a fine woman, and not married. Somehow Will did not think of himself when he declared it was time for Annie to get settled; he thought of what was customary, of the duty of women; they must get married. Annie's objections alarmed him, made him suspicious of some evil enchantment upon her, and so he got peevish and worried her. He would call from his bed at midnight, "I ha' a mind to see yew settled, Annie," and he would come home at night with the reproof, "Yew watches I tu close." He had even helped himself to money without permission, though he had not spent it. Two men were after Annie, both of them rough creatures; and one of them, Joseph Boone, was a moral wreck for whom matrimony was a

deadly sin. The other was a miner of average merit. Old Will gave their names to Mark, and was astonished when he showed displeasure. Will appeared to be inconsistent: but the truth was he did not look far enough, and, being always on the plats, he saw too little of the life below. He regarded Boone as a young man tilling his weeds, not as a man of forty with settled vices, covered with bloated flesh and part of it in the grave. He himself had grown a few weeds in the hot days of his youth, when he would run after the coaches up Fursdon Hill and get a taste from the guard's bottle if he could keep up with the horses; but he had let them wither when he made his first marriage. He supposed that others did the same, comparing them to himself, regarding what they ought to do and somehow not seeing with that one dim eye what did happen. Those ears, which were open to sounds which were inaudible to others, were deaf to the great noises.

Mark knew it was no use arguing with his father, and Annie could well take care of herself. Besides Gerard had come up, and was asking Will whether he was not tired of work and when the last stone was likely to be placed upon the wall. The old man was happy again; no other thought could trouble him when the sermon was of stones and the big book of the rocks was opened before him.

"'Tis my duty to clear mun," he said, waving his hand towards a waste of granite. "I wun't die avore 'tis done. I ha' worked up here vor sixty-five years, young master. Vor dree tree-plantings I ha' worked."

He turned and pointed down to the mine, around which firs were waving, big trees that looked old. They were grown to supply timber for the workings.

"I saw they planted," said Will. "I saw the trees avore they planted, and I saw the trees avore they cut down. The road warn't made when I begun to work, and there wur wild volk on Dartmoor in them days, master. Vaither would bring his gun along, vor they wild lads and maidens would nip over the wall and steal the coat of mun. Where wur yew, young

master," asked Will, with a twinkle in his single eye, "when I cleared yonder plats and built the wall around?"

"I was in the mists those days," said Gerard.

"Well, that be a gude answer, I reckon. I could go along thikky wall, I tell ye, and mind every stoane like a shepherd minds his sheep. Thikky wan knocked me over, and thikky wan rolled over I. There be a story in every wan o' they gurt stoanes vor me, master."

"Why, you're a stone yourself," Gerard muttered, and he was not far from the truth. Old Will looked like one of those fantastic figures which centuries of hard weather have chiselled out of the black rocks of the tors. He was so massive and dark with scars, and his old clothes clung to him like moss and lichen; the dust of granite had become engrained in his skin: his beard was full of it, and flakes of mica glittered upon his arms, and his teeth were like quartz-splinters, his face was red with iron-ore, and his boots were green with copper. It was as if the granite had been stirred into life and had taken the form of a man.

"What will you do when the work is finished?" Gerard asked.

"I'll ha' a Sunday," said Will. "I'll say I done it all myself."

"What's the good of it?"

Will straightened himself as if to answer, but the words did not come. He looked at his son; but he, too, had no answer, for Mark knew well enough how all this great labour was in vain: he and his father would die, the granite and the evil would still be left unconquered. Seeds would not flourish up there, grain would not ripen, even the grass would not grow; the furious winds went by, cutting off vegetation with a keen edge. So much for his father's work; and for his own, sluggish opinion would stun with the blunt edge of indifference. Listeners might say, "He preaches well, he's never at a loss for a word, he's got a good voice, he ought to get on in the world, he's not so eloquent as somebody else, but he's more outspoken"; and that would be all.

"I reckon," said Old Will at last, "if I warn't working here I'd be doing something else"; and that was the only answer.

Gerard and Mark were silent for some time as they walked away. The moor was getting dark, mysterious, and in that religious gloom it seemed almost irreverent to speak, and anything trivial was out of place.

Suddenly Mark removed his hat, and Gerard, without knowing why, but anxious to imitate, followed his example.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

"That old organ," Mark replied.

"Don't go down yet. I have nothing to do, and I feel safe up here."

"We will go to the bogs," Mark said. "They used to haunt me as a child. I have not been that way since I came home."

They took a different course, leading upwards; and the lights of Fursdon came out, as if signalling to the stars which came out too, but would not answer because they were pure lights and those below were grease.

"You feel safe up here," said Mark, as if he was giving out his text.

"I mean there is no temptation," Gerard replied, after a little pause. "If there was, one could hardly yield to it here. It is so solemn. There is a feeling here that one cannot be hidden. Have you treated me fairly?" he asked quickly; and then in a lower voice, "Does nothing tempt you?"

Mark smiled, and then his face grew hard.

"No man was ever more tempted," he said, thinking of Edith, Patience, and Caleb's gold.

"Will you tell me?" asked Gerard eagerly. "Open out to me. Let there be no secrets between us. I want to know you better and to learn."

"There must be one secret between us, and if one there may as well be others. We are different," said Mark. "You are open, I am reserved. I have treated you fairly," he added almost angrily.

"You called me a brute."

"I lost my temper. That, unfortunately, is no new thing; but I meant what I said. I think you are weak."

"Not now," cried Gerard. "I feel that I can conquer anything——"

"Your ambition," broke in Mark. "Your desire to stand well in the sight of bigger men than yourself, your desire to get on in the world. You are afraid of unpopularity."

"I have my parents to think of and my own living. A man must be popular if he is to do anything."

"For himself."

"And for others. Would you listen to a man you disliked?"

"I would if he was right and I was wrong. You feel safe here," said Mark contemptuously. "Are you not safe at home?"

"Not in the evening. I come in tired and depressed; I can't work or do anything except think and look at the walls. It gets dark outside, and then I can hear my watch ticking and my heart beating. Every tick and beat seem to say, 'There's no harm. A little will do you good.' And the horrible part of it is I really want it."

"Get up and go for a walk," said Mark roughly.

"I know it does me good. It makes me feel happier, better, stronger. Is it so much worse than other medicine?"

"Take care," said Mark. "You are making yourself devil's advocate."

"I am only speaking in self-defence. I don't know why I want it, or why I like it. I do like it. I am being honest. My head gets so painful after a day's work, and I know I can get rid of the pain, but perhaps I don't know sometimes how much I have taken; but when I have taken it I can work, I can prepare my sermon, I can think—and it's the only time I can really speak. I am stating facts."

"Here are some more. Every time you succumb to a temptation you are going down, you are increasing your weakness; every time you resist it successfully you are going up,

you are adding to your strength. You are a changed man since we first came together in the hospital; and you have changed fearfully since we met in Teign woods. In the hospital you were strong, in the woods you were undecided, and now you are weak. The next step is——"

"I shall not take it. I am strong again now."

"Until the craving comes again."

"I shall beat it—easily. It came last night, and I threw it off. I had hardly any sleep, but I beat it. I have something which is stronger than temptation," said Gerard happily. "Her photograph," he murmured.

"She has been weak," Mark muttered.

"I keep it always before me," Gerard went on. "And when the desire comes I take it up and look right into those eyes, and set my teeth and persuade myself that she knows. I have it in my bedroom with a little lamp burning in front, and when my head gets bad I look and try to believe she is there with her hand upon my forehead. Where are you?" he cried. "What was that you said?"

"Don't pry into my mind," said Mark. "I have my thoughts as well as you."

"You are rough sometimes."

"I am from rough stock. I am self-made. I am a bit of the old granite which my father is made of. Never mind my words. My heart is all right."

"I can't break down again," said Gerard confidently. "That which is for me is stronger than that which is against me. I have her spirit helping me. The year will go, and by then I shall be as I was in the hospital. I shall have changed again—I shall be strong."

"Put the devil on his mettle," Mark muttered savagely. "You wouldn't if——"

"What?" cried Gerard.

"If you saw that thing ahead."

Gerard shuddered. "I haven't your eyes and ears," he muttered. "You are always trying to conquer people by terror."

"Fear is the master. Can't you see?" said Mark strongly.

"Only the rocks, or rather the outlines."

"I see something going on in front. It is dark, and yet it stands out against the darkness. Now it is like a great frog hopping away. Are you blind?"

"I don't see ghosts," said Gerard rather smartly.

"It seemed to me when you spoke, and said how easy it was to win, that something rolled out of you and hopped away."

"I meant what I said," Gerard replied suddenly. "Determination is half the battle. Besides I must win. Everything depends upon it, my life, death, and hereafter."

Then he fell shivering all of a sudden, as if the wind had come out of an ice-cavern on the moor and had struck him in the marrow. "I am not a coward," he muttered.

"Stand up then and open your eyes. Spiller," cried Mark in a fanatical manner. "If you can't hear that I believe you are done for."

"I hear the brook, the wind. What is that groaning sound —not the reeds? The dead furze-bushes," he muttered.

"It is a woman with sad eyes, with sorrow beneath her eyes, playing an old hymn, playing an instument of music," Mark muttered, with something like madness in his voice. "Playing upon her own heart-strings," he murmured. "And looking at me."

"Let's go back," said Gerard. "I have never known him like this."

"You feel safe up here. You are not safe. We are both in danger of the terror. It walks here. I knew it was about as a child, and tried to do good lest it should seize me. You have nothing to do—that is the other point. Nothing to do when half the people are in hell, and the other half are telling them it is heaven."

"What are you doing then?" cried Gerard fiercely. "You are hard and uncharitable."

"No, no, drunkard, wine-bibber, slave——"

"I will leave you. Our friendship ends."

"There is no friendship. I am building, I am clearing the ground, I have the rock under my hammer, and with the help of my God I shall smash it into fragments," shouted Mark. "My wall shall be thicker than my father's. If he has used an iron bar I will use a thunderbolt. I will climb up into heaven and bring it down. Don't touch me—my hands are full of fire."

Then Gerard remembered that day when Old Will had sat beside him in the dimness of the cathedral and had "heard mun avore." It was the touch of genius, the fire which starts up in unexpected places, and if it was in the old hard body a mere stone giving out a spark when struck, it was in Mark a flame revealing by its light the bridge which led across to madness.

"You are a coward," cried Mark; but Gerard did not answer him.

"You were a coward upon the bridge. I said, 'Come with me, and we will sacrifice ourselves together': and you answered, 'I cannot come, for I love myself, I love respectability, I love cant, I love pride.'"

"Be just," said Gerard quietly.

"You said, 'I love a woman.' God help you for it. Your way of loving is to set the affections upon yourself."

"I will not answer you."

"Will you come now then? Will you be a reformed drunkard—do you talk about the pain in your head? I have got my building—let them call it a barn, a place for beasts—so it is. Will you come there and pour out your soul, will you come sober, and teach the beasts how to stop crawling? No answer. The man's damned. He dares not, she knows he dares not. The man loves an angel, and digs in the dirt to find her."

"You shall not make me angry," said Gerard, his voice shaking like his feet, for they were at the edge of the bogs, and found themselves also among tall, straight stones.

"Do you still say you see nothing?" Mark shouted. "Now we are in the temple of terror, and the lamp is burning before the altar."

Gerard stopped with a great shudder, because of the tones of Mark's voice, and because he could see at last. They had reached the entrance to a long stone avenue leading down to the bogs, and were standing between two pillars like huge door-posts, cold with the dew and wind; and the evening was very dark.

"I will promise," Gerard faltered. "I will help you openly. I will not be ashamed."

The lamp burnt at the end of the avenue. It was easy to scoff at it from afar, to call it idle names, to declare it was nothing. By the fire of the wood-cutters, in the camp of the oak-rhinders, in any place where the woods run down from the fringe of the moor, and the smoke of peat curls upward and there is a smell of dead fern, men whisper about it and say it is alight with death; and some will laugh, and some will shiver; but those who have stood upon the bog at night, and seen the blue lamp hovering near the earth, suggesting what is below the earth, and seeming to cut them off for ever from what is above the earth, they think, if only for that night, to make amends.

CHAPTER XV

ABOUT THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

"A MEETING of the Band of Mighty Men will be held in Church Beer on Friday evening, when Mr Walter Wood will deliver an address on Strength. All are welcome."

So ran a little notice fastened to gate-posts and trees, a humble thing, almost lost among big posters announcing in the queer jargon of the auctioneer the forthcoming sale of all that commodious and convenient dwelling-house and that magnificent building site upon Dartmoor, referring to some crumbling cottage and stone-covered plat hardly worth an old obolus. But the little notice was carefully read and much commented upon; and George Vid went about with one of the bills stuck upon his cart, and declared it was a step in the right direction—thank God!

This Band of Mighty Men was one of Mark's ideas, the beginning of a brotherhood, so he hoped, the sowing of dragon's teeth, and he gave his tiny army—nothing but a feeble regiment, a kind of pressed gang—its big name as a bait. He knew that men-folk loved a swelling title, to play at soldiers if there was to be no actual fighting, to act a swaggering part with old-fashioned cloaks and property swords, so he chose the title to encourage them. All he caught at the first throw were a few small fish, young men with vacant faces and muscles not hard enough, and some old fellows who had the memory of past days to smother; but just before the meeting two valuable recruits presented themselves, Eli and Oli, who were always ready for new experiences, combats, and religions; and Eli was prepared to argue with Oli upon the points which were

essential to full brotherhood by trying to put him upon his back in his own flower-garden.

The barn in which the meeting was to be held had belonged in olden times to the church, or had at least been intimately connected with it. According to Old Will, whose statements were not always reliable, since he maintained that Fursdon had been once a borough town, this barn had been a sort of common-room for the parish. It commenced as a bakery, a place where the Sacramental wafers had been prepared during the reign of Popery; and when the Reformation jumped to the opposite extreme, after the fashion of revolutions, what was left of the church still retained the barn, and as there were no more wafers to be baked, used the building as a brew-house. Fursdon, which had another name in those days, was famous for its ales. The vestry was the local authority, which had to find money, not only for church expenses, but for every call which the Crown might be pleased to make for the maintenance of the army or its royal necessities; and as the smallest coin of the realm was even then reserved for the offertory, other methods of raising money had to be resorted to. So the vestry gave church ales, from which have descended a vast brood of small festivities, such as school-treats, excursions, chapel-teas, socials, bazaars; for at these ales eatables were provided without charge. Only the liquor had to be paid for, so that even the free lunch of the publican would seem to be no new thing. During the feast the Sacramental oven was open to all, and the people brought food to be cooked therein, adding the same to the common stock; and after eating and drinking they played at quarterstaff, cock-throwing, bowling, and breaking each other's heads. The ale, which was brewed by the churchwardens themselves, was very strong, and made the sport strenuous. From the baking of the Sacramental wafer to rioting and drunkenness would seem a downward step; but it was not so really, as all the wise men of Fursdon knew; for the wafer represented Popery, it encouraged idolatry, while the ales supplied the needs of Church and State and gave the people a merry revel.

When the barn departed from the ownership of the church it was still called Church Ale, though the orgies in connection with it had disappeared; and later it became Church Beer, because beer, bere, or bear, meaning an abode, cropped up everywhere in the neighbourhood, and ignorance connecting ale with beer, giving to the latter the meaning which the sound suggested, caused the change of title which had become fixed. Possession of the barn, if not the legal title, for there were no deeds, had passed to a farmer, who permitted Mark to have it at a moderate rental, as he was not making any use of it himself.

These records of Church Beer were given by Old Will to Eli and Oli, garnished with fantastic tellings of his own. Will rarely entered the village upon a week-day and he had not visited that portion where the pink cottage stood for nearly half a century. Necessity brought him, for Will was not immortal. Rheumatism was torturing him, his right arm was "brave and hot," and a "searching pain" ran down it, causing him to drop the hammer and consider the flesh. He went to visit the brothers and implore the aid of the famous little lady-doctors which they kept.

"I ha' teased mun wi' stingy trade," he observed in his broad manner, which, being interpreted, meant that he had beaten his arm with nettles. "But 'em wun't tease." Nor was it wonderful, for those arms had been exposed to the sun and storm of four generations.

"Be I welcome?" asked Will.

"Us ha' plenty," suggested Eli.

"A bit tu plenty," said Oli.

So they decided Will was welcome, that is to say, the little physicians were at his disposal.

"Best go alone," said Oli. "They'll be kind if us goes wi' ye."

"I ha' been wicked wi' 'em," said Will. "The garden wur vull of 'em as I comed through, and I hit at 'em and told 'em they wur idle. They don't like to be told 'em be idle," he said shrewdly. "How be I to mak' 'em peevish?" he asked.

"Tap on the hives," said Oli.

"They'll think yew'm telling of a death," said Eli. "Stand avore the hives and keep 'em from going in. That'll mak' 'em peevish."

Will permitted a veil to be drawn about his features, which made him chuckle and declare he felt like a maid being "took to church," where he had been thrice, he said: once for regeneration unwillingly, and twice for matrimony on his own initiative; and he would go once more, he added, which would be like the first visit, because he wouldn't "mind" anything about it. Then he ventured into the garden, and, seeing a massive bumbledor, he knocked the insect down as a sort of declaration of war upon the entire race.

Plenty of bees were circling about the hive, and the little front-door was decidedly congested with traffic. Will felt somewhat nervous, put his bare arm behind his back, and muttered, "Don't ye sting I," until he saw the heads of the two brothers peeping over the fruit-bushes. Then he held out the arm which was to be operated upon, boldly, and called bitterly, "Aw, I b'ain't afeard o' yew, and so I tell ye. Proper lot of idle old toads—nought but bumble and buzz. That's what yew be."

"Stand over the hive," shouted Eli.

"I be agwaine to," said Will, moving forward gingerly; and while doing so, he caught his boot in the root of an old apple-tree, stumbled and fell against a hive. Bee trumpets and drums sounded an alarm, the Amazons rushed out with their stings unsheathed, and Will was smothered. They covered him from head to foot, and, concentrating upon the bare arm, which seemed to them the weak part of the defence, they plunged their little swords in to the hilt.

"I don't object to it," declared Will, grinning, and then he retreated, blinded by the flying squadrons, and followed by the laughing brothers. The bees settled upon them also, but though they were very angry, they remained still wise and did not sting their masters.

"Du 'em hurt?" called Oli, when they were on the right

side of the door and the garden was swelling with the noise of battle.

"They wur warm," said Old Will. "Middling warm, but better than the roomy-spasms."

While waiting for the bees to settle down, they discussed the meeting; and after Will had told his stories, mingling his facts with myth, regarding Church Beer, the talk became more personal, and Eli said, "Yew'm a mighty man, I reckon?"

"I be tu old vor such capers," Will answered. "Annie put a posy o' ribbon in my coat, and said 'twur a sign I wur one of 'em, but when I comed over on the plats the wind tored mun out. I don't see what gude be coming on't," he said, being averse to any new thing. "'Tis better to work alone. When yew works wi' a mate he'm telling to yew and yew'm telling to him. His work b'ain't your work naythur. He ha' got his way and yew ha' got yourn."

"Yew'm agwaine to the meeting?" asked Oli.

"I ha' a mind to go," said Will. "But I don't want to hearken to a foreigner."

The brothers sympathised with much head-shaking. They too had no wish to hear outsiders, and they thought Mark had made a mistake. On this occasion he was too modest, over-anxious to keep himself in the background; he was introducing the stranger, so that the neighbours should not think he was setting himself above them, when, as a matter of fact, it was Mark they wanted to hear. There was no satisfying them. They would not hearken to any strange voice, and they desired Mark to speak, so that they might find an opportunity for condemning him.

Mark was finding out something else: those that were with him were also against him. He had written various letters to societies and leaders in the temperance movement, asking that missionaries should be sent, and the replies that came, when there were any, filled him with amazement. Who was Mark? What sort of fellow was this lonely labourer who was trying to

force himself among them? They did not know him, but it seemed to them he might be reaping where they had sown, plunging his sickle into their wheat-field, trying to seize the credit for what they had done. It was the old story of the divided camp, the army without discipline, every private disobeying his officer, each officer calling himself commander-in-chief, the old story of religious jealousy. Even the most saintly hermit has no tender feeling for an equally saintly brother who sets up an opposition shrine on the other side of the road. Both may have the same opinions and work for the same end; but the first hermit will have black thoughts when the votive offerings go to the rival's shrine, and he may suggest to the people that hermit number two has not quite attained to that degree of perfection which he himself enjoys, that he is in short a dangerous man, and it would be wiser to have nothing to do with him. The temperance people were most anxious that something should be done to make people more sober, but they must do it, not Mark or any other obscure person. He had no right to fish in their pond; he was a poacher in their preserves, and they suspected he was trespassing for no honest purpose.

At length he received a letter. A missioner was coming down, an altogether suitable person, a son of the people, one who had himself been brought up in an atmosphere of drink, and would therefore know what he was talking about. A small fee would be required, for, although Mr Walter Wood worked entirely for the good of others, it was necessary, almost imperative, that he should live.

The day arrived, and with it the man. Mark's enthusiasm was shaken when he met the missioner, a little man attired in an old frock-coat, brown boots turning up at the toes, a bowler hat, with dirty hands and an unwashed face blotched with pimples. He was a man of vast assurance, who drank water aggressively, walked defiantly with hands deep in his coat-tails, and darted his finger about as he spoke. His grammar was unlovely; his aspirates were like the tribes of Judah, and his

eloquence belonged to the traditional order of the tub. This parcel of materialism had been sent to Mark to perform a spiritual work.

Church Beer was crowded, for a meeting of any kind was popular with the people. Ribbon-decked members of the brotherhood sat in front, with the exception of Eli and Oli, who appeared upon the platform for advertising purposes, like the pillars of Hercules. Old Will was present, but could not be induced to take his seat in front, as he had never put himself forward, so he stood near the door, looking and feeling out of place. The chair was empty until the last moment, and then Gerard came in, pale and nervous, keeping his promise to Mark at the risk of his rector's displeasure, and occupied it. Mr Wood shook hands with him emphatically, declared it was an unexpected honour, and hoped that nothing he was about to say would give offence. There was a suspicious quietness about the barn as Gerard rose to introduce the speaker.

"It's his chance," Mark muttered. "Will he take it?"

Gerard did not take it, but managed instead to occupy five minutes in avoiding the subject; and while he spoke a little thunderstorm broke outside and made the proceedings dramatic. He understood that his friend Mr Yeo was starting a social league, which had for its object the bringing together of the men into a closer relationship. That was how Gerard put it, and hurried on to remark that the audience had not come to hear him, and he would stand no longer between them and the man they wanted to hear. Gerard seemed to have lost the gift of free-speech; his words came uneasily, and he managed to convey to the meeting an impression that he was only there because he felt he ought to be.

"Young parson don't want to talk," said one miner to another.

"He knows he didn't ought to be here," said the other. "They ses he and squire gets rolling drunk."

"Mark Yeo be to the bottom on't."

"That's how it be. Gentlevolk can get drunk, but us must

keep sober. They can drink what 'em likes, but Mark Yeo ses 'tis our duty to drink watter."

The speaker threw himself into a fighting attitude, called the assembly dear friends, described himself as a labouring man whose proud privilege it was to address them that night. Then he poured out a glass of water, held it up, and put the meeting into a good humour by describing it as an excellent beverage which had made him what he was. Everybody laughed, for as a fine specimen of a man the speaker was a failure, and one of the genial voices suggested, "Put a little spirit in it, master."

"The spirit is coming, my lads," shouted the speaker; and just then the thunder made him inaudible and the door was pushed open gently. A murmur ran round the barn as the squire entered in his quiet way, told the men at the door not to move, smiled graciously, and said he would stand as he could not stay long. Then he took up his position against the wall and played with his eye-glasses.

"I must give my countenance to this business," he muttered; but it was a cynical countenance, and the onlookers saw something upon it which suggested that the squire was not upon the side of the orator.

Mr Wood kept his promise and supplied the spirit. In the injudicious manner of the extremist he observed that the man who couldn't keep sober ought to be cleared out of the country, and those who supplied him with liquor were made to be hanged. "Brewers," he shouted. "Send 'em to hell"; and as he went on, Mark became horrified, for it was obvious that the speaker hated brewers, not because of their profession, but because they had obtained money, part of which Mr Wood considered ought to be in his pocket. Whatever the speaker's opinion might be, these crude methods, the method of exaggeration, the method of injustice, the method of sheer abuse, were merely harmful. Mark knew he could do so much better himself if the men would only let him speak.

There was a pause, and Vivian could be seen quietly laugh-

ing. "This is really very amusing," he murmured, and those who stood by heard him and passed his criticism on. Everyone was looking towards the squire, anxious to take their cue from him. He was the central figure and the master, although he stood beside the door; he was the big man. Those upon the platform were nobodies, a foreigner and the curate who attended unwillingly; Mark hardly counted. Only a few more cynical smiles were required to give an excuse for breaking up the meeting. They had been very tolerant to allow Mr Wood to speak at all, but he was amusing them; and the whisper was passed on, "Squire ses he'm very amusing."

Soon Mark felt his temper rising, for the speaker was unmasking. Mr Wood cared very little for temperance as a virtue or as an essential to morality. It was as a political force that he valued it, and now he had come to the important part of his speech. "Look 'ere, lads," he shouted. "I'm a poor man speaking to poor men, and what I've come to tell you is, we've got to stick together against the rich man. We've got to look after ourselves and get back what they've taken from us, and to do that we must keep sober, 'ave our wits about us. We must keep ourselves cool and strong and stick together in a Brotherhood of Mighty Men to shake off the yoke what the oppressors 'ave put upon our necks. We've got to show 'em that Jack's as good as 'is master, my dear friends."

So he went on, and now he was eloquent because he was speaking from his own passions. Politics he had come to preach and nothing else, and the fine ideal of perfect sobriety was nothing to him beyond a party war-cry. It was not the drunkard who was to be driven out of the country, but the landlord; not the brewer who was to be hanged, but the landowner; and the hypocritical mask of religion was to cover every thievish countenance with a smile of tender love for the downtrodden. Mark had to sit and listen to the prostitution of his ideal, to hear his religion exhibited for political ends, and his brotherhood, his spiritual dream, dragged in the dirt

of opportunism. This temperance orator was showing his true colours. He opened his coat and displayed the red tie; he declared death against all geese which laid golden eggs; he stormed about the platform and banged upon the table, and proclaimed the virtues of sobriety as a means for making poor men rich by robbing others, and declaimed the value of water, because it kept the body strong to strike blows and sober to commit burglary. He was earnest indeed, but he had hold of earnestness by its dark end.

The listeners warmed themselves at his heat, found the fire not displeasing, although they could not understand the nature of the fuel, and some of them applauded the burning, especially George Vid, who clapped his big hands together and in his usual devout fashion thanked God for sending them such a Daniel. Others looked at Vivian, found him still smiling, and they translated the smiles into sympathy with the speaker, who was preaching a doctrine few of those present were able to understand. The squire's smiles meant nothing and were dangerous on that account. Nobody had ever found him out, though he was transparent; he did not attempt to conceal anything, his nature was always upon the surface; and for this reason he remained undiscovered. Had he attempted to hide himself, he would have stood revealed. Knowing nothing of his own nature, he let it rise to the surface, with the result that no man knew more about it than he did himself. Deceiving himself, he deceived others; he did not wish to be thought a good man, therefore he was thought to be one; he did not desire to be kind, therefore he appeared to be so. He was regarded as the best landlord in the district, and it puzzled him to know why.

"Who is that young woman?" he asked, as the orator paused to refresh himself; while Mark went round to the chairman's side and implored him to call the man to order; but Gerard could only whisper, "He's got the meeting with him. There would be a scene if I interfered"; to which Mark muttered, "Then I shall stop him myself."

"Her be Caleb Starke's daughter," answered the miner who had been addressed. "Her bides wi' her sister, Mrs Mosscrop, and they ses she'm agwaine to marry Mark Yeo."

Vivian took an interest in Mark, and was possessed of certain information concerning him; therefore he was surprised, supposing that Mark would have flown at higher game. He looked again at the face of Patience, learnt something from it, asked more questions, and soon learnt a great deal more. For a moment the squire's strange face was shocked, then he smiled again, thanked his informant and said he had been very much amused.

The speaker went on with his fireworks. What with his flamboyant words, the thunder, and heavy rain drumming upon the slates, the audience became excited; for nothing affects human nature much more than weather, and a storm outside will often rouse a storm within. There was no calm moonlight around Church Beer, nor any peaceful doctrine within. Instead of temperance there was tempest. "Keep sober," shouted the speaker, intoxicated with his own grandiloquence, "and we'll turn the rascals out"; but soberness was far away and anarchy reigned. Even the moor seemed in revolution, for the rain shifted the pebbles, the boulders were grinding as the rivers rose; lightning played weirdly about the tors, a fireball burst over the red and roaring mine, and down the great road came the sand in waves. Only Old Will was calm, for he understood storms and cared nothing about speeches. He was thinking of the plats and how fine the granite would be looking with the rain sweeping across in a dusty mist and the lightning running down and along the white cleavages. It was all music to Old Will; merely the organ playing, with its trumpet-stop out.

"I like this," said Vivian; and again the message went round, but not now in a whisper, that the squire was on the side of the speaker. He was really thinking of the Mosscrops and Patience and his little property of Blue Violet.

There came a storm within the storm. A voice shouted,

"Stop!" and Mark was on his feet, his face white and the scar upon it red and throbbing. That besetting weakness, his temper, had got the mastery, and now he did not care what happened; he, too, was strong with the storm and was prepared to shout against it and defy it. His duty was plain: to silence that speaker, and speak the words which had been left unspoken. He pushed Mr Wood against the table, took his place, opened his mouth, but not a sound could be heard; for the barn was in uproar from end to end, women were screaming in fear, and men were shouting in anger; and some of the fiercer spirits were pressing forward crying, "Throw him out."

Gerard called for order, perceived that the meeting was out of control, left the chair, and took up his stand at Mark's side. He had shown himself weak, but at the prospect of violence he was strong. Gerard was not made of the stuff which runs away while the fight is on. The difficulty was to get him upon the battlefield. Eli and Oli also rose, smiling at each other. If there was to be any fighting, they would certainly not be lookers on.

"The young men are magnificent," muttered Vivian. "Mark Yeo is positively Pauline."

"Us b'ain't agwaine to hearken to Mark Yeo," yelled a miner at his side.

"Really, this is no affair of mine," said the laughing squire. "I understand a good reputation is still an asset."

He went out, drawing his coat about his ears. He did not look imposing or in the least fierce; he looked ugly, but nobody saw that face which the lightning revealed. There was nothing distinguished about this well-bred man, who, with his cynical smiles and muttered expressions, had led the hostility against Mark, who could have quieted that meeting with his authority had he so desired, who could have won for the zealot a fair and patient hearing. He resembled an elderly man, genial, not proud, in whose mind existed cunning, in whose heart love and hatred were so queerly mixed that

what he called love was really hatred. "There goes," someone might have said, "a small tradesman who has made some swindling profit."

"I like Mark Yeo," he murmured gently, "and I like Spiller. I am delighted with them both."

It was told about the parish next day what a turmoil there had been in Church Beer and what brave fighting: how Eli and Oli had stood upon the platform tossing the men back into the body of the building, smiling all the time; how Mr Wood, supposing the hostility was directed against himself, had climbed aloft upon a rafter; how Mark would have been beaten savagely had the curate not protected him. Many a lie enlarged the story as it rolled. The truth of the matter was, there had been noises, big voices, and nothing else, for George Vid and his fellows were not men who attacked boldly; they got behind the back, they pinched and scratched, but did not strike. Eli and Oli had certainly thrown a few young fellows back who were about to rush the platform, for the fun of the thing; but the others simply reeled about and bawled themselves thirsty; then they paused, looked at each other, and began to push for the door. Their angry passions hissed in the rain, and went out; and these ignorant men, who lived under the big road and were dominated by the mine, arrived at the conclusion that they had delivered themselves from Mark Yeo, fanatics, water-drinkers, and foreigners by —mere noise.

Mark and Gerard got away together in the stormy night, which was a refreshing calm after the babel of the barn. There was a method in Nature lacking in her over-vaunted work called man. The tempestuous rain was doing a great work, soaking the roots, producing growth, clearing the dirty places, filling the springs among the hills. The hard work accomplished by the elements put every living thing to shame; the smallest raindrop was a greater force than the strongest brain. Nature was the predominant, man the sleeping partner; for he scatters the grain, then goes babbling, while Nature does the work, never

idle, always sober, never, in her wildest mood, losing control over the awful things she uses. If Nature should become intoxicated, what then? If the sun should reel near the earth and the planets stray from their courses; if the grain should become intoxicated, if horses and cattle should turn to drunkenness, what then? It was the storm more than anything else, the lightning, thunder, and wild rain, which proclaimed the fact that human beings are the weakest things alive, weak because they may do what they like; weak because they will not use their strength. If the thunder and lightning had been human, the world would have been wiped out, but they are controlled by laws which men may break.

"This means solitude," said Mark at last; and Gerard knew what he meant. Nobody was on his side; even those who professed to fight under the same banner were against him, because he was not one of them; he had no political motive in view, he did not wish to float the cause of sobriety upon any financial sea. "And I am the fool. Poor Mark's alone," he added jeeringly.

"Where's your hat?"

"With my hopes, in Church Beer."

They came under a large sycamore, its branches sweeping, and every forked leaf a small cascade; beneath it was sheltered like a cave, dark and hollow, where the cool, fresh water dripped.

"Don't have the solitude," said Gerard sharply; and Mark did not reply to him then. "You see now how hopeless it is. You can't stop the rain. You can fight men, but not human nature. That is what you are trying to do. What did you think when you heard those shouts?"

"That I would rather be a failure."

"It is no use. Believe me," said Gerard earnestly. "If a message came to me from heaven promising success if you and I went out together like the old apostles, I would go with you——"

"Well," interrupted Mark, "it is that message which has come to me."

"You mistake. It comes out of yourself."

"Who put it there?" asked Mark; and Gerard was silent. "There are some sent into the world to lead hopeless lives. We don't know why," said Mark. "We are sent here to try and move mountains."

"I had your ideas once," said Gerard. "But before I met you that day in the woods I had reasoned with myself, overcome myself——"

"Damned yourself."

"No, no. Don't begin that sort of thing again. I saw that any struggle against human nature must end in a wasted life. I may be weaker than you, but I am wiser."

"Only two classes of beings know they are wise—drunkards and madmen."

"Have it so if you like." Then Gerard put his hand upon Mark's arm and said earnestly, "Give it up. You have done enough. Not much real happiness is given to any of us; and you have a right to your share. You have told me there is a place waiting for you. Go back to it. You can do nothing here."

"And leave everything?" said Mark.

"What is there here you need regret leaving? The people hate you."

"Ah, you don't know what I mean. I should be leaving everything. He's a poor workman who throws his tools down because his master dislikes him. If I went from here before my time is up, I should be false to myself and false to the sign which has guided my life. How do you explain that, Spiller—the sign? If it is part of myself, it still proceeds from something higher than myself. It only suggests, it does not tell me plainly what I am to do, and yet I know sometimes. I know it is not leading me to honour. I know I shall never go back. I know I shall end here in Fursdon where I was born, end like a brute perhaps, kicked out by my own people, end as a miserable failure, with nothing done and damned by everyone. I can see that as plainly as you saw

the corpse-light above the bog. And I know, too, I could escape by leaving Fursdon and returning to an easy life abroad. I am going to stay and face it out. You needn't put any fine motive upon me and call me strong. I am not; I am weak; I'm a coward, afraid of myself and horribly afraid of death. I am not afraid to stay, but I should be afraid to go, for my mind would torture me to death if I went from here before my time. There will be another meeting in Church Beer next week, and I shall speak—and so will you."

"I cannot," said Gerard firmly, almost doggedly. "There will be enough trouble over this night's meeting."

"You will not."

"Because it is useless. If I saw the faintest chance of doing any good, I would. I must think of myself and—and obey the rector. I could show you a letter from my father—— "

"You are going back on your promise."

"You terrify people so. I promised when you frightened me on the moor, and I have kept my word. I came to the meeting——"

"And apologised for being there."

"Well, I shall probably be asked to find another curacy as it is. It is very hard for a clergyman to get on if he is badly spoken of. I have to make a home for someone," he added gently.

"It's all selfishness. A cynic said to me once, 'When a man falls in love his life is ruined.' There's a grain of truth in that, for when a man loves a woman—I am speaking of the ordinary woman—his great work ceases, his ambition falls to the ground. If he loves her, he lives for her; if he marries, he has to maintain her; and he has to conform to the ways of the world; he cannot afford to make himself unpopular; he must not fail and drag her down."

"That's how I look at it," said Gerard eagerly.

"You want to look at it in that way."

"If you loved——"

"Ah yes," said Mark, lifting up his streaming face to the raindrops. "I am not a human being. I am incapable of feeling."

"I did not say so. If you had parents who had stinted themselves to give you the best possible education, you would think of them. If you loved a girl who is almost homeless and quite unhappy, you would think of her."

"If you had a being tearing at you, driving you out to do a little, even a very little good; if you had what is generally known as a conscience, you would think of that."

Lightning flashed as he spoke through the green branches, and from the opposite side of the road came the crash of a falling bough.

"It is dangerous underneath this tree," cried Gerard.

"It is dangerous," repeated Mark, but he was not referring to the lightning. He was thinking of the evening in the purple wood, and how he had seen Gerard shrinking back from the still, deep water, terrified at the dark shapes of snags and fishes; and he was thinking also of the days ahead, stretching out like the moorland bristling with granite, nothing over it except a light, and that the faint blue glimmer of the corpse-candle; and only himself in the solitude. There was something splendid in the thought of that loneliness, in the broodings of a mind alone; but why was the life given, why was the mind made? If they were useless, why all this labour in vain? What profit was there for a lonely man to cry in the wilderness and strike his body against the rocks until the storm swept down and carried him away?

Gerard was hurrying from the sycamore, thinking of his life.

"Spiller," said Mark, coming up to him, "you are going to desert me?"

"I am not," said Gerard stoutly. "I will help you in any way I can, but I must not appear on platforms with you or be seen about with you too much. You will come to my rooms, and we can talk and make plans, and—I will pray for you," he said somewhat lamely.

"We will part," said Mark. "You are with me in your tongue, but against me with your heart. Go your way, Spiller. Do you see the end of it?"

They were standing in a bare field, across which ran a footpath. They could only see each other's faces now and then.

"Don't frighten me again," Gerard pleaded. The night was so wild.

"A brave man fears nothing but himself. You are your own worst enemy; you are yielding to weakness without counting the cost, and when temptation comes to you again——"

"I shall beat it," said Gerard confidently.

"You have yielded to-night. When that is known——"

"Where?" interrupted Gerard.

Mark thought of Edith.

"Where?" cried Gerard.

Mark thought of Vivian.

"Where?" shouted Gerard, for he was afraid again.

Mark thought of "that other thing."

CHAPTER XVI

ABOUT HEADS AND MINDS

VIVIAN went on his way to Rose Ash, thinking of his man-power. He passed through life jeering; he had uttered gibes to Mrs Allen and others about his servants. "I say to this one 'Go,' and he won't; I say to another 'Do this,' and he replies, 'Do it yourself.'" Such were his ordinary remarks, which had no truth in them; for his servants bowed down before the big, loose figure, afraid of it and yet fond of it. They liked their master even when he swore at them; but then he was the same to every one, from the rector to the scullery-maid. His servants had no hard times; they lived well, and did much as they liked; the maids could stay out all night so long as their household duties were performed.

The thunder rolling round his head gave the idea of his personal greatness. His power was immense, owning as he did a great part of the parish, and being wealthy enough to buy up the rest; he could, if he liked, pull down every house in the place except the rectory, drive the inhabitants elsewhere, stop the mine which was always in financial difficulties and could only continue working by using a watercourse belonging to him; he could wipe Fursdon off the map of Devonshire. He was the local deity, god of the water, of labour, of the home; and he had the power, without breaking any law, to bring chaos back again.

One little corner of his property, a triangular patch worth little, hidden out of sight at the bend of the tiny lane, was in his mind; and the name which he connected with that property

was Patience Starke. He was still laughing at the memory of those faces at the meeting; the white face of Mark the zealot, the red face of the orator, the nervous face of Gerard, and all the different types of angry faces about the barn; but through them all he saw the silly face of Patience, pretty, but debased, and he joined it mentally in union with his cottage of Blue Violet.

"Extraordinary men! Wonderful women!" he muttered. "What an imagination the Creator must have!"

That terror, which Mark was always hinting at, might have struck into the minds of many people entering that dark house, but it was congenial to the squire. He removed his wet things and went to the library; a cold lamp was burning there, giving the little light that was needful. Servants were rarely seen about the passages, and invisible hands seemed to do the work. The squire had expressed a wish to see a lighted candle in a certain niche; and there it was. All things were done without sound. The house was haunted by servants, rather than regulated by them; and only the sound of some door closing in the far distance announced their presence.

Vivian helped himself to liquor, then walked about, his slippers padding the polished boards like the footfalls of a tiger, his hands behind him, opening door after door to sniff at the musty smell, and to say in his contented way, "This must be the nursery. This must be the drawing-room. I think I shall like it." His mind would not work unless he moved about. To sit down after dark meant falling asleep at once; and there was something he had to think about, that bold little face, the Mosscrops, the cottage up the lane.

"I like the name of Blue Violet," he murmured; and then his mind wandered off again as he entered another room, struck a match, lighted a dusty candle, and peered up at a row of black portraits.

"I like the idea of ancestor-worship. It is the only religion which makes a direct appeal to me. It would amuse me to walk about the house with a pot of incense and wave it before

these portraits. My grandmother had a strong sense of humour—dear thing. I fancy she would rather have a pinch of snuff than the best frankincense. My great-grandfather—incense, I am sure, would not satisfy him. He would rather have some old port—ah, Spiller must come and dine. I like having Spiller to dinner. I shall do up this room next year, and then I must get married and play croquet. I believe Hosken has pronounced sentence of excommunication against me. He would remove it if I learnt croquet, and if I beat him I could apply for beatification. But I think I would rather remain excommunicate."

He put out the candle and resumed his wanderings, which brought him back to the library and the lamp. He took up a pen, but dropped it because he could not see to write. "I will go to-morrow morning," he said. "It is a pleasant walk to Blue Violet. Mosscrop is a good fellow. I like Mosscrop"; and while he was thus musing he fell asleep.

All night the squire's mind kept on working, casting him back to the days of his ancestors who had drowned witches, punished moral offenders, played the tyrant over their serfs. Those old aristocrats stepped out of their frames and possessed the passages, some very fine folk and good sportsmen, others hard and vindictive, others of the pharisaical type, all of them alive in the blood of their descendant.

"I am almost frightened when I think of my morality," Vivian murmured, as he made the long journey from his bedroom to the verandah where he breakfasted in fine weather. "When the court is pure, subjects have no excuse to be immoral. I could sign a death-warrant," he said, smiling affectionately, as he hurried through the last room. "Yes, I think so. But I cannot kill the vipers. It is foolish; but they are such beautiful creatures, and they look so nice upon the rocks. What a heavenly morning! I feel more than usual virtuous."

He patted the heads of his dogs, hurried to the gate of the paddock to kiss the noses of pampered horses. "You are a

dear thing. Yes, and I love you too. There must be no jealousy." He frisked back through the long grass of the lawn, walked the verandah with a cup of coffee, which he drank with noisy gulps, scattered bread to the birds, shook the roses, and laughed when the petals were shed upon his boots. Sweet shadows were all around. The garden was full of soothing noises. The hollows of the green and red country were like vats filled with new wine; and an eager breeze came off the moor, which was in a tender mood pink with young heather; the country had been washed by the storm, and now the sun clothed it with the garment of gold wrought about with divers colours.

Temperance was sweeping the path when she heard the loose stones of the lane rattling. She looked, leaning upon the handle of the broom, until the big dark figure came in sight, stooping as usual, the eye-glasses swinging, and she heard a laugh and a satisfied voice praising the beauty of the lane, the air that swept down it, and the view which could be seen from it. Temperance hurried back into the cottage and wondered if she could find a white apron to hang over that shocking old skirt; and she called to Patience, who was still not dressed, "Squire Vivian be coming, and he'll look in here vor certain."

Who would say the squire was not a gentleman? He brushed the dust from his boots with the broom, knocked at the door, called to know if Mrs Mosscrop could speak with him, removed his hat as he entered, did not sit down until he was invited to. No wonder his people thought him kind and good when he behaved as if he was one of them. They would have rather been called fools by Vivian than wise men by Mark. The squire was lord of the place and a great gentleman, and to be called a fool by him was a sort of honour, a conferring of the patent of social equality upon them.

"Mrs Mosscrop," said Vivian, "your potatoes are looking well."

"Ees, your honour," said the woman nervously. "My husband sees after they. He'm a gude workman, sir."

"The cabbages, too—they are better than mine, I think."

"Timothy grows fine cabbages, your honour."

"The Almighty gets little credit in his own world," murmured Vivian. "I have heard nothing but good reports about Mosscrop," he said aloud.

"My husband be a gude man," said proud Temperance as defiantly as she dared.

"I shall certainly ask you to take the potatoes and cabbages. I am told you have a sister here."

"Ees, your honour."

"Who is going to marry Mark Yeo?"

The answer was the same.

"Who ought to have married her some time ago?"

"No, your honour."

"You must be a little less reserved, Mrs Mosscrop."

Temperance struggled to find words. She fixed her eyes upon the red, bare patch where she meant to have a garden next summer, and at last she said, "Patty be biding here vor a time, till her gets married."

"When will that be?"

"I don't know, your honour."

"Whose child is that?"

Again the same answer.

"Has your sister any claim upon it?"

"I don't know, your honour."

"I do not like falsehoods, Mrs Mosscrop," said Vivian, smiling amiably. "Where is Mosscrop?"

"He'm cutting the hedge, sir. He b'ain't fur."

"I will ask you to go for him."

Temperance bowed her head and hurried down the path in her ungainly manner, while the squire went out, strolled about, and murmured aphorisms upon morality. He approached the child, which was sprawling in the dust, and bent to examine it.

"A bastard!" he said, classifying it like an insect. "There is to me an air of abandon about such creatures. I should not blame Hosken if, when he baptised these babies, he used

the water liberally—a complete immersion, prolonged, would get rid of a lot of hereditary mischief. The law, however, puts its clause in: better a diseased growth than none. If I had my way I would breed children scientifically, as we do horses and cattle. The weak ones would be eliminated—by baptism —and only the fittest should survive. But perhaps in that case," he added, laughing gently, "I myself should not have survived my initiation into the community."

The gate clicked, the Mosscrops proceeded up the path fearfully, Timothy taking off his cap, replacing it, his arm going up and down as if he was learning to play upon the cymbals. Vivian greeted him kindly, asked his questions again, but Timothy was dumb. He also knew nothing, and he seemed indeed almost surprised to hear that Patience was lodging beneath his roof. The stupidity was natural, but the ignorance was assumed, for whatever might befall it was necessary to protect his own relations. It was part of the system.

"As I understand it, this young woman is a whore?" said Vivian in his agreeable way, which, however, was too much for Temperance, who covered her face and turned away.

"I don't know, your honour," laboured Timothy.

"We must come to an end of this want of knowledge. I should not like to be hard upon you, Mosscrop—your cabbages are the best I have seen this year—but I must keep my cottages clean. I like Blue Violet. It is one of my favourite places. I admire the view so much," said the squire, who until that morning had forgotten what the little piece of property was like. "I am too good natured with my tenants," he muttered. "Is there anything you know, Mosscrop?"

"I don't know, your honour."

"Come here, Mrs Mosscrop, please. You are two good people, and I like you both. I am going to give you every opportunity to remain as my tenants. Go to this young woman, if you please. Tell her to pack her box, and give her an hour to leave Blue Violet. I am sure that is the best arrangement."

"Aw, your honour," faltered Temperance. "Don't ye turn us out."

"My dear woman, it would hurt me to turn you out. But I must purify Blue Violet."

"Where can Patty go, your honour? She'm a lively girl, and us ha' found it hard to mak' she bide here, and Mark Yeo be allus praying she to bide here quiet along wi' we. If yew turns she out, sir, there b'ain't no place for she to go. Vaither and mother wun't tak' she in, vor she ha' cursed 'em, your honour. She went and put the bellows on the table. Patty b'ain't a bad girl, sir, but she'm lively. She'm quiet now, your honour, and she'll bide quiet if yew lets she stay; but if yew turns she out, she'll go back, sir. She'll ha' to go back, your honour, to the old trade."

"I am glad you know something, Mrs Mosscrop," said Vivian, looking at the cottage with an owner's eye. "She might go and see Mr Hosken. I believe there are homes for these young women, where they are fumigated, and given an opportunity to reclaim their character, and he might be able to get her into one."

If anything had been required to stiffen Timothy's determination he found it in these words, for to his ignorance a home meant only one thing, and that the workhouse. No connection of his was going there, if he could help it, for the disgrace would fall also upon him; thus he could only do his duty by refusing to let Patience go. Yet he had no ill-feeling towards the squire, who was only performing his duty, which was probably painful to one of his kindly nature. Ill-luck had brought them into opposition, and Timothy accepted the position phlegmatically and was disposed to make the best of a very bad job.

"Us can't turn she out, your honour," he said respectfully.

"Us wun't," said Temperance stoutly.

"Well, my dear people," said the genial squire, "you shall have till lunch-time to think about it. I will send a man to receive your final answer. If the young woman goes you

shall stay, and I want you to stay. I shall be very sorry to see you go. And you must go. You must leave Blue Violet this very day, if you decide to keep the girl."

Vivian was above the law in these small matters. He would give no notice to these people; he would eject them at once; and they had no redress, for they knew no law, had no money to buy it, and no courage to oppose the lord of the land. Even Timothy's master was the squire's tenant. He was king of the clay and lord also of the grass.

The Mosscrops were left standing in attitudes of hopelessness, and could only mutter, "Where shall us go?" Any sort of habitation was in that district a prize. Every old shed had its occupant. Cottages were not to be had, and for that reason people were leaving the place, the county and the country; driven out, for want of a home, to some free land, where they were allowed to build their own. Eviction from Blue Violet seemed to mean dismissal from the place and loss of employment for Timothy. There was room enough and to spare at Love Lane; but old Barseba had her own religion, and a narrow creed, perhaps harsh, made hard by endless work and no play; and when a mother and daughter declare war there is no peace.

Vivian departed, all smiles and good-humour, after expressing the hope that the Mosscrops would be sensible and good, as he liked good people. Timothy had to go back to the hedge-cutting, while Temperance went to her sister, and said simply, "Us ha' got to go out. Will ye come and give me a hand wi' the cloam?"

Patience was doing her hair, and, being a fine lady, that took some time. She had seen Vivian in the garden, had guessed something was up, and was not surprised when she heard the sentence.

"I'll go," she said at once.

"Us wun't let ye," said Temperance firmly.

"I'll go and live with Mark. I'm going to marry him, so folks can't say anything."

Temperance shook her head. She at least was no fool, and that mind of hers had made her far better acquainted with Mark than Patience would ever be.

"He wun't ha' ye," she said.

"Can't I go and keep house for him and old Wreford?" asked Patience.

"'Tis no gude talking like that, Patty. Mark wouldn't let ye inside the door; not till yew'm married to him."

"I reckon, then, I'd best get off and try my luck in London," said Patience, but without the old enthusiasm. Utterly stupid as she was she could think a little of those things which experience had forced upon her. She was lazy, she liked comforts, and the passion for doing nothing had increased upon her. She remembered the wet streets, the cold winds, the mud streaming along the gutters; the necessity for getting a few shillings somehow; the rough and sometimes brutal treatment; her wretched room. One got tired of it, or at least physically exhausted. On the other hand, and she began to see it now, marriage with Mark suggested possibilities. He was getting a real gentleman, he was friendly with the curate, he went about with great men like Mr Walter Wood, he was the head of a movement, he spoke better than the rector, he had a future. He seemed to have no money, but that would come, if he was going up in the world, for a gentleman simply meant to Patience a rich man. Also she would travel, for Mark was going to settle abroad ultimately. Patience did not desire respectability, but a life of ease and comfort appealed most strongly. She did not want religion, but if there was money in it she would go on her knees at once. She did not care for Mark in the least, but if he was going to be a gentleman she was eager to swear the usual oath. All this proved at least one thing: the value of experience. Patience had been through the mill; had seen a coloured life ahead, had hurried to it, and discovered that the colours were mostly false, that what she had supposed to be red and gold were black and white. It also proved another thing:

the folly of advising youth. The young creature goes to the wise man and asks to be given the experience which will save him or her from passing through the grinding-mill, and the wise man gives it gladly, "You will have a hard time and a very difficult fight. Often you will feel like giving up in despair; and you can only hope to succeed in the end by struggling on, never giving way, looking forward always, never back; and, even if you do win, it will probably not be until you have reached a time of life when most of the pleasures have lost their power to charm; and you will find the reward not so very wonderful after all; and often you will wonder whether the hard work, the denial of self, the apparent waste of your pleasure-loving years were worth the victory." But youth is not going to listen to that sort of pessimism. "Oh, oh, that may be all very true!" it answers. "But what has happened to you will not happen to me. I shall not have a hard time. There will be no difficult struggle for me, because you see, wise man, I know very well I shall succeed at once."

Youth is the most ungrateful thing there is. It begs a favour, and upon receiving it gibes at the giver. It asks to be given the secret, and, when it receives the information, returns sneers for thanks. It must go through the mill and be crushed; it must have its conceited oils squeezed out. You cannot force a plant into seed before it has flowered, for the seed can only be the result of the flower and its object-soul.

Every star seemed adverse to the Mosscrops now that the centre of local life had turned his kindness from them. Timothy's master would not allow him the afternoon to clear his furniture out. All the work fell upon Temperance, for Patience was merely in the way. It was the last day, however; pleasure and sadness came to Temperance together; no more visits to that pump nor another walk from the faggot-stack. It was no use thinking of the future; the time at Blue Violet was over. Timothy growled and swore, cursed Patience for bringing bad luck upon them; but when the man came from Rose Ash he gave a defiant message to carry back to the

master. He would not let Patience go, because of the system; but it was allowable to call her names, even to express a hope she would die in the gutter. He hated her, but could not turn her out because of that pig-like stubborness which had in it a peculiar piece of virtue.

"Where be us to sleep?" he asked the man who was to see that the eviction was accomplished. "Half the cottages be squire's, t'other half be parson's. Them what would tak' we in wun't tak' she."

But the mind of Temperance was helping her, and she tramped off to the village.

Eli and Oli were performing a surgical operation upon a boot when a tapping came upon the door.

"It never rains but 'tis wet," said Oli, misquoting the proverb. "Here be more butes. Open the door, my dear."

"I opened last time," said Eli.

"That's right," said Oli; and he went to the door, adjusting his spectacles and looking wise.

"Why, Mrs Mosscrop!" he exclaimed. "I ain't seed yew since yew wur a maiden. Little slip of a black-eyed maiden yew wur, to be sure. My dear, 'tis Mrs Mosscrop come to visit we. Please to come in," he invited. "Us be hard to work, but us be allus busy old bumbledors. Proper grindstones us be."

"Us be allus grinding one against t'other, but us ain't wored out yet," said Eli.

"Aw, my dear souls, us be turned out o' house and home!" cried Temperance, and she told the whole story to the good brothers.

Oli let his piece of ironstone drop to the floor; Eli picked up the boot and examined it; then they looked at each other.

"Squire be main sot upon duty," said Oli.

"I allus did say squire wur tu gude to volk," said Eli. "When a landlord be gude, he reckons to be paid. Yew ses to mun, 'My chimney smokes.' He ses, 'I'll soon see to

him,' and he du. But one day he comes along and ses, 'How about that old chimney what I spent money on? Yew'm in my debt.'"

"Us owes squire no rent," said Temperance.

"Yew don't tak' me, my dear," said Eli. "Yew ha' got to du what he thinks be vitty, and if yew don't he ses, 'I ha' been gude to yew, and this be the way yew pays me back.' He ha' got yew either way. If yew ses, 'Us ha' paid the rent,' he'll answer, 'Vor every shilling yew ha' paid me I ha' spent a pound to mak' yew comfortable.' And if yew ses, 'Us wur doing our duty by taking sister in,' he'll say, 'I be doing mine by turning yew out.' Don't ye try to get the better of squire, my dear."

"Mrs Mosscrop ain't come along to hearken to sermons," said Oli. "Yew should ha' waited till I had spoke. I be as old as yew."

"Yew b'ain't," said Eli. "I be a lot older than yew—ten minutes, I reckon."

"I ha' a mind to put yew on your back among your gilly-flowers," threatened Oli.

"I ha' bumped my young brother's shoulders on his old cabbage-stalks till 'em wur vair blue wi' bruises," said Eli to the visitor. "I ha' half a mind to du it again."

Temperance hardly heard these customary exchanges. Her mind had worried her nerves and brought on a headache. She had eaten nothing, had been dragging furniture about, and now she felt faint and sick; longing to lie down and rest somewhere, but knowing she was homeless. Keener than the other villagers, as keen in her way as Mark, she had seen through the squire, or at least she thought so. She felt sure he was not turning them out from any sense of duty. He was himself too lax, too easy-going to care if young women did lapse from virtue; he had an ulterior motive, which was not kindly; and Temperance had it in her mind to believe that he was harming them out of malevolence. And she could do nothing, could not touch him, could not repay evil with evil, which was said

to be the wrong way, as it was the only just one. Yes, there was one thing, very powerful, something about the dark side of existence, if she could only find the words. That she knew could shake the strongest life, for she had seen it work.

"Us ha' got no woman," Oli was saying; and the old heads went together with whisperings which became louder and clearer as the child-brothers warmed to the cause of charity, and reminded each other they had been given more than they required: a pink cottage, half of it unused; a fair garden for all the months of the year, with alleys on both sides and images cut in yew and water in perpetual motion; with a stately row of bee-hives and good air; a money-box beneath the floor, by no means empty; and everything they looked on was their own; no landlord stared over their hedge. They were their own tyrants, Eli King of flowers and Oli President of vegetables; and Tom and Ted were Vices—both good ones.

"My young brother ha' got half a mind to ask ye to come here," said Oli.

"Little fellow yonder ses he ha' got a mind to say yew'm welcome," added Eli.

"God bless yew, volks!" cried Temperance, though she had half expected it, for she knew the big twins and the kindness of their hearts.

The brothers looked at each other in their funny way and declared that the divine blessing was no new thing. It came every morning and lasted through the day; and remained upon the garden all night, so that they could not possibly prevent the flowers and vegetables —nor were there any to equal them in the kingdom—from growing; and when the spring frosts were distributed none fell upon their young plants. They had so many blessings they didn't know what to do with them all, and so they decided to give a few away.

Soon after six Timothy was free; he had procured a cart and a mate to help him. The moving of the things commenced, but Temperance was not there. She had gone to walk in the

bottoms, under the birches and alders, where the air was heavy with marsh smells and the lush vegetation of the bogs grew as high as her aching head. It was an extraordinary thing for a woman like Temperance to take a walk. They only do so when they are beside themselves, driven wild by illness, melancholy, lack of money, or worrying about that child which is never born. It was not the mind which drove Temperance out, but the head. She had done enough, and was near the breaking-point. There was not a duty she had neglected. She had cared for and resisted her sister; she had made as good a home as she could for her husband, and had stood up for him always; she had screwed the rent together and had rendered it scrupulously. What was her reward? Because she had been kind to Patience her home was broken up; because she was a good wife her husband knocked her teeth out—although it was true he apologised afterwards—but neither Patience nor Timothy were responsible for that headache. It was the squire. His will was upon her, pressing her life out. That kindly face was making her dark inwardly; that gentle laugh was bringing her face to face with the black art. She must perform that duty, if she should be killed for it. That almost almighty strength must be sapped somehow; and there was a way, there was a wise one left.

For one in her position the deed required almost superhuman courage. It meant passing through the gates of Rose Ash, entering the house, facing the squire in his room, that dark and dreadful library, its walls a horror of strange pictures, and frowning with big, black books. It seemed an impossible act, but Temperance was not sane. These young women, married and childless, suffer from periods of madness: the same scene, the same work, the same hours of loneliness every day; the same walls every year, the same pump and woodstack, and the same writhing little tracks which their own boots have beaten out as the smith beats iron when it is hot. It makes them mad.

Temperance knew what she was doing. She left the scented

bottoms and climbed upwards; height after height she ascended, as if on her way to steal stuff from heaven until she reached the big road. Then she went down towards Dry Arch.

All the world was mad that day, made so by that headache and the hoarse screams behind the cottage. A cherry-tree hung over it, a stream passed through the yard behind, where Joseph Boone was staggering about translated into godliness. He had created his own world and filled it with living creatures; but he was a poor God after all, for he could not control his beings, which had grown according to their own inclinations, and had taken upon themselves horrible shapes that he had not meant them to have; and now they frightened him. He had tried to make butterflies, and they had grown into tarantulas and scorpions. He was splashing about the shallow stream, trying to drink, but unable to reach the water, and shouting wildly, "This is a holy day. Mother is dead. My old mother is in a box with the spiders."

Judy Boone was at the door, listening with the pathetic resignation of old age, stooping very much, a queer bundle of rags, out of which peeped a marvellously wrinkled face.

"Joseph b'ain't quite the boy to-day," she explained. "He fancies I be dead. Come inside, my dear."

Temperance went in, and she seemed so composed that Judy could not guess what was working in her mind. Not a word nor a moment did she waste, for already the sense of duty was upon her, and she knew that the work was being neglected. She told the old woman what she had come for, but Judy did not reply at once. She drew a tattered curtain back from a dirty window covered with cobwebs and peeped into the yard. "I ha' to watch the boy," she said, speaking in the matter-of-fact tones of a nurse looking after a child and seeing that it did not get into mischief. "He gets a mind to hang hisself. He throws a rope across the bough of the cherry-tree, and I ha' to run out and tear mun down. He'm main cruel fond of a drop o' liquor, be Joseph, but he'm a

gude son else. He gets this way, my dear, when he fancies I be dead. Shows the gude heart that beats in mun."

Temperance went on talking, but more wildly, and Judy could perceive there was trouble about.

"I don't like to give it ye, my dear," she said. "Yew wun't get to act vulish? 'Tis a whist thing to meddle wi', and I don't work it now. I be feared they'll bury me wi' my toes downwards."

"Yew'm the only one," Temperance muttered.

"Aw, my dear, there be plenty left. I hears 'em around in the night, making more noise than Joseph be now, as 'em rolls the barrels o' cider up over Dartmoor. I can mind the time when a dozen carts stood under Dry Arch every market day, and the varmers would come in to see me and get the medicine. Times be changed now, and I can tell ye of many a varm where 'tis easy vor black volk to get in and spoil the butter, vor 'em ha' given up keeping a Bible in the dairy. If I gives yew the medicine yew wun't say nought about it?"

Temperance promised, and the old woman knew she could be trusted. Poor old Judy professed the power of witchcraft, but she couldn't keep her house clean, and she knew no spell to cast upon her son. She went to a horrible little cupboard, groped about, and produced an aged Bible. This she opened, and pointed to a yellow scrawl of writing upon one of the blank pages; and as Temperance could make nothing of the mystic signs she translated the silly jargon word by word.

"I ha' to mak' 'en drink?" Temperance muttered.

"Ees, he mun drink, my dear. If he wun't drink 'tis enough if yew takes the cup and sprinkles a little of the watter over mun, but they du say it don't work so well. 'Tis Timothy yew wants it vor, I reckon. Mind what yew'm doing, my dear, vor the medicine be fearful strong, and 'twill mak' ye a widdy vor certain."

"It b'aint Timothy," said Temperance. "I wun't say who 'tis."

"Best not," said the old woman. "Them what don't know

can't tell. I takes no money, my dear. I be old now, and ha' given it up; but I be allus willing to help a poor soul, and let 'em say what 'em will, yew can help wi' black as well as yew can help wi' white, and I don't know how the one be any worse than t'other. Look in his eye, my dear. Look to mun strong, and don't be afeard."

Vivian came in from his woods, as it was getting dark, and received the information that Blue Violet was empty. His usual amiable mood seemed to have departed from him; but he had met Hosken, who thanked him warmly for his strong and courageous action, and his effort to improve the moral tone of the place by clearing the Mosscrops out of Blue Violet, which, he added with a struggle to remember his classics, he had himself commenced to regard as the local Augean stable of vice. The squire merely requested him not to be a damned fool, and walked on. Had the rector met him earlier, or had he come to Rose Ash and begged Vivian to assert his authority by getting rid of the Mosscrops, it was likely he would have left them undisturbed. "It is so hard to annoy Hosken," he grumbled. "And now I have pleased him."

A good dinner restored the squire, and he smiled again. He had recently obtained a fresh supply of old brandy which was guaranteed to possess very superior qualities, and he tested it that evening with satisfactory results. It was excellent brandy, and he did not discover until he rose from his chair that it also possessed highly stimulating qualities. He was not steady; during his walk around the table he bumped against it twice; he found himself laughing more than usual, and inclined towards hospitality. "Spiller must try this brandy," he said, looking at the steady flames of the candles. "Spiller has excused himself lately. I must tell him I cannot be treated in this manner. Willcox," he called to the invisible man who was yet within hearing, "I will have the brandy in the library—and a cup of coffee," he added, making for the passage and muttering, "I like Miss Gribbin, but she must not deprive me of my companions. There have been those

funny promises called lovers' vows, and there have been funny tears," he laughed, "and funny stories about knights in armour trampling upon most submissive dragons. Really, when I want to laugh I have only to think of the people. Spiller shall come and dine with me, or he won't get his living. Ah!" he murmured, "I have made a mistake."

Vivian had opened the wrong door and discovered himself in darkness, tumbling over pictures and old china littered about the floor. "I think this must be the nursery," he said. "Yes, this will do for the nursery, southern aspect, pleasant outlook. There is a tank outside the window. I must take that away and plant rose-bushes. Children like roses and butterflies, I have always noticed they like butterflies. I like them too. Willcox," he called, "light me to the library."

The man appeared, with eyes that saw nothing, and ears that heard not, and preceded his master, lighting his steps with a small, cold candle. The squire lowered himself into his arm-chair, lighted a cigarette, more to keep himself awake than because he cared for smoking, and told the man he should not require him again. "You may go and embrace the maids," he said grimly, and the man went out with a face of stone.

The long windows were open, and across them were drawn those heavy curtains which the squire loved, not meeting, but with a space between sufficient for a head to show; and sometimes a leaf-cluster of the wisteria outside was thrust between them by the breeze, rustled a moment, then departed. There was no nervousness about Vivian; solitude and night had no terrors for him. He did not know himself how devoted he was to that loneliness and those dark passages; and the things of night were his companions. He welcomed the white moths which fluttered in to play about the lamp; and the beetles he called "dear things"; even the bats were received gladly. It was a life which would have driven most men mad, but it was happiness to Vivian. He could not change; the ideals of others were his natural terrors; the affectionate touch of a woman would have disturbed his peace; the sight of her would

have spoilt his tranquillity, and the voice of a companion would have made him cynical; but the whirring of beetles and the flutterings of moths pleased his soul. He was in touch with Nature somehow, but he sought her out by a path of his own.

"I must read," he said, looking about the room. "Where are you, Gibbon? I must read my dear Gibbon."

He stood, but not well; made a step towards one of the book-cases, then lost himself, and stared about like a man in a mist. His memory had gone; he had no idea why he was out of his chair. He returned to it, poured out a little brandy, smiled at it; and then, without a sound, with not the smallest shifting of the curtains, an apparition entered, a small, hairy thing, exhausted, sadly thin and starved, as if it had been the ghost of a child, with black, piteous eyes, so tiny was it, so sad—it passed between the curtains with less noise than a moth; and Vivian leaned forward and looked down, shading his eyes from the lamplight.

The little thing must have felt those eyes. It rose upon its hind legs, pawing wildly at the air, every movement saying, "I am starving; I have no home"; and then rolled over on its side through weakness, but recovered itself, stood up again patiently, went on begging the big, strong creature to be kind and give it something to eat, doing all that it could, its one little trick, to soften the heart of the half-drunk god who had the power of life and death over little starving dogs, who could destroy them utterly, or raise them to great honour with a collar and a name.

"I am delighted with you, dear thing," said the squire.

The little animal came and kissed his feet, and Vivian took it up on his knees and blessed the skin and bones, and wiped the mournful eyes with his own silk handkerchief.

"I have not been so pleased with any thing for a long time. I will take you in, and you shall have food to eat and a cushion to sleep on; and you shall be chief of all the dogs, because you are small and weak, and you begged so nicely and amused me.

I am very sorry for you, little dog. We will go and find some biscuits, and then you shall eat."

He got up and shuffled slowly to the dining-room, and at every step the starving animal went through its dumb show, climbing on its hind legs, beating the air in supplication, while the squire laughed and was well pleased. "Dear thing. It's a darling. Yes, it is," he murmured. "It shall have a good home."

With a box of biscuits he returned, hearing nothing, and he emptied the box upon the carpet, seeing nothing; nor was it until his new companion began to choke itself that he did look up towards the curtains; and even then he was not frightened, although for an instant there was a creeping across his head and a coldness down his back. Then he was himself again.

"Who are you?" he said angrily.

There was no reply.

"I really am afraid you will get yourself into trouble. What is the meaning of this—coming into my house at night, and through the window?"

Vivian could make little of the figure. He could not see it well, for the light was dim, and there was a shawl over its head down to its eyes; and if he could have seen that face in a strong light he might not have recognised it, for it was nearly blue, a mad thing, and it was half-dead with terror.

The only sound came from the floor, where the little dog was crunching biscuits wildly.

"The supply of lost souls seems to exceed the demand," muttered Vivian, conscious that the position was ridiculous. "I suppose I must touch the creature and put it out. Some woman who has lost her senses, got into the fields, saw my light, strayed here. The thing doesn't move. I should like it better if it would mutter and jump about."

The figure was moving, for it was shuddering horribly, but Vivian could not see that.

"I must request you not to be a damned fool and to get out," he said smoothly; and then, feeling that it would be

necessary to take some more vigorous action against this lunatic, he reached for his glass to search for an inspiration there, sipped from it; and immediately a horribly low and gurgling voice came into the room.

"Go in! Go in! Make him hot, and make him swell, make him thin, walk him away, work him away. Go into the arms and into the legs and into the feet. Go into the face. Go into the mind in wet weather, and go into the heart in dry weather. He have got it. He have got it very well and don't know what he have got, and now he will go to his grave."

The squire was leaning forward with his head on one side, listening; and when the voice ceased there was no more figure. The curtains were not shaking, and the moths went on blundering about the lamp, and the little dog was the only noisy thing as it ate and ate and could not be satisfied.

"I have been cursed," said the squire, with a delighted laugh. "I am to waste away gradually to the grave. It is a more amusing world than I thought it was."

CHAPTER XVII

ABOUT TEMPERAMENT

A CENTURY ago any sort of writing was practically unknown among the village folk of Fursdon. The character of others had to be discussed openly, yet with some care, for slandering was a danger when spoken; the lie could be traced to its origin. Then education arose, drove out the old wise men and women, the local oracles who could just read and write enough for their purposes, gathered the children into schools, fed them with strong meat, and turned them out with the conviction that Fursdon was little better than a miserable hole in the rocks. Something known as geography assured them there was a land of gold with a city of plenty awaiting their presence somewhere. Something known as history told them the voice of the people was the voice of God, and leaders of great movements had risen from the plough. They were taught also how to write and read, that is to say how to make an illiterate scrawl, and how to make sense of the scrawls of others. It was enough; the arts were delivered into their hands; and thus the anonymous letter came into existence.

That educational tree, being shaken, rains down a few apples of discord with a quantity of dead leaves; surely the most expensive tree ever planted, and the most unprofitable. Consider those two beside the pump, the boy of eighteen and the old fellow of eighty. One has passed all his standards, the other has received no education at all; but upon each face is the same expression, that vacant, almost horrible, look of semi-idiocy. The ancient is by far the readier of the two, simply

because he is old; his is the folly which knows everything; when caught trespassing, he will say, "Aw, my dear soul, I knows all about that. I ha' never been took up in my life," and continues to trespass with what appears to be offensiveness, but is actually idiocy. The boy, on the other hand, does not profess wisdom; his only idea is to get good wages, which would be a laudable ambition were it not for the fact that his employer could himself perform the work in half the time occupied by standing near the boy to see that the work was done. But the lad can write and read, for a time at least; he can send "lots of love and kisses" to his sweetheart, though he finds it easier to describe the same with the crosses which his ancestors used instead of signing their names; he knows nothing about punctuation, and puts his capitals anywhere but their right places, and sometimes he cannot spell his own name. Still he is educated: he reads his *Police Gazette* on Sundays, and tries to insult the gentry, and when he receives his wages will buy a glass of whisky, just to show he is a gentleman himself. He has probably a pair of kid gloves somewhere in his clothes-box, as a visible sign that he has been educated; and when some young soldier comes home on leave he is inclined to sneer and to say something about a poor, uneducated chap without any independence, and may also add that it would make no difference to him if his country was delivered into the hands of its enemies so long as he continued to get his beer-money. The uneducated old man is the better of the two, because he is not a dangerous lunatic.

Great men cannot be kept down. A genius will rise to the top without education, because it is all in him, and one touch of nature brings it out; and for the dull, a partial education is worse than none. A villager who learns to read and write is as rare as the public-school boy who learns Latin and Greek. Both are crammed, and the stuffing produces indigestion. The public-school boy has his chances in the future: he is shaped like a block of granite until he fits the corner into which he is to be built; but the villager has no such chances.

He must return to that condition for which the school-teacher has sought to unfit him. The result is with some discontent, in others hatred for those better situated; and from these roots spring drunkenness and slandering. Education has paved the way; it is a matter of safe writing instead of dangerous speaking. It costs a halfpenny, but the money is worth it; and so the anonymous postcard comes into being.

"I know your dirty little tricks and your immoral life, and you meeting men in that wood. Why don't you marry Mark Yeo? He's good enough for you, for I know you are an illegitimate child yourself. You are just one of those dreadful creatures. No punishment can be too severe for such an one as you."

That was one of the postcards sent to Edith. The act was so simple, costing only a halfpenny, and there was very little risk of detection, still less of any action being taken. The postmaster had read it, not altogether to himself; the postman had shown it at every door he stopped; of course, it was true, such things are easy to believe. It is so simple to make a life wretched. It only costs a halfpenny.

There was no motive. The deed had been prompted by the sheer beastliness of human nature, through hatred of the quiet, pale girl, who dared to call herself a lady. Almost every week one such card was delivered by the grinning postman, and Gerard got them too, some abusive, some warning him that Edith was no better than Patience Starke, and, indeed, worse, because she was a hypocrite. The vile things were common enough, and the writers were cunning; only those were attacked who were not likely to retaliate or could not afford to. No anonymous missive found its way to Rose Ash, for the rascals guessed that Vivian, in his struggles to detect the writer, might have torn down the village.

At last a note came to Gerard, saying: "I must see you again. I am so miserable. Meet me at the Wallabrook on Thursday afternoon. I cannot be sure of the time, but not later than four. It must be there; in the open, where only harmless devils can see me."

It looked like waving the white handkerchief, it was a sort of surrender; but Edith could not help it.

Thursday was a day when the light upon the moor was wonderful; so clear that every stone stood out, so light that the furze-bushes barely shivered. There was no gloom at all, even the shadows were as blue as flowers, sweeping past like robes of unseen texture; and a joyfulness was in the air, the rings of stones seemed dancing. Edith could hear the tinkling of the water as she hurried on, and she felt in love; she made herself a garden and filled it with heroes; she touched the blocks of granite, turned them into men, calling them hers, telling them to go out and fight, giving them hydras to vanquish, and stables to cleanse, and promising to smile when they came back victorious. What greater reward could they desire than tenderness? She would give to each hero a crown—would it not be enough? A hero could not ask for more. She was in love; she made herself a heaven out of the clear air and colours, and that, too, she populated; her favourite flowers were brought in and there was no autumn; and all the angels had kind, strong faces and rough hands, for they had worked and made their hands rough. Eli and Oli were among them, and even Old Will was within the wall; and Mark had a place, but where was Gerard? Certainly he was there, and yet she could not find him at first. Had he made a mistake, lost the way, or was he still wandering about on the dark side of the wall trying to find the way in? It was impossible that Gerard should be absent when even Vivian was present. There he was, muttering as usual, his kindly face peering out of the brambles which he had insisted upon bringing in with him. It was a heaven of strong things, and only those who could build and climb should enter.

"There he is," she murmured. "He is straight and tall, and he is strong. No man who stood like that could possibly be weak."

The Wallabrook itself was invisible, but a black figure like a boundary stone marked where it ran. It stood beside the

huge stone clapper which made a bridge, its back towards Edith. How well he stood, how splendidly his head was carried against the breeze! It was to be a Thursday of Thursdays, for Gerard was strong at last.

"He might come to me. If I were Gerard I should run—but I have frightened him," she murmured; and then said firmly, "There must be no weakness. We must remember it is probation time."

Still the figure did not move, and the head was not turned. Edith came up, breathing quickly, for she was a little nervous; and then she placed her hand on his arm and said, "Oh, Gerard! people are such brutes!"

He turned with a kind of shudder, and it was not Gerard. He was strong and pale-faced, an ugly scar ran across his face, he seemed to be cold; and he was Mark Yeo.

All that Edith noticed just then was that the Wallabrook was brimming, and upon the great slab of bridge was a bundle, not neat—the sort of bundle carried by the man who has no home—and she perceived also that the colours upon the moorland were too wonderful to last.

"Spiller could not come," that quiet figure was saying; and then he, too, began to notice the colours and forget the words.

"He ought to have come," Edith said, and went on saying that, because she could not think of anything else. It was not right that the rose-pink of that plateau should be diseased by the leprosy of winter.

"He could not come," repeated the pale man. "He has to represent the rector at a meeting. The message came at the last moment; I happened to pass, he called me, begged me to let you know. You would not blame him if you had seen—I don't think he is well."

"But you! Why can't I think?" she smiled.

"This is the result of that day I spoke to you in the wood. You have been writing my story," said Mark boldly. "I thought I would show you how far you had got."

"It's no use," she said. "These colours blind me."

"There is a stone quite near which is said to be enchanted."

"It is enchantment," she murmured; then turned, but seemed perplexed. "There are so many little streams, young ones which will be rivers soon. Is this the way?"

"Along the bank," Mark answered.

"Show me the way," said Edith.

Everywhere she saw mighty rocks like giants and heroes, all of them rounded, but none round. There was nothing finished, and, as they passed on, the place became a garden of stones, the first garden planted and shaped by water and of an excellent design. There was no trifling work, not anything carved or filmy, but all magnificent of the Doric kind. It was architecture in the highest. It was the grandeur of granite, not cramped by forms, but free, the granite in flower; and the sculptor was the brook, working with chisels made of silver, and the hammer of the storm behind, to make fair mounds and alleys out of stone.

"Is this the rock they call a tolmen?" said Edith. "It seems to have changed"; but then everything had changed that day.

It was a great mass in the bed of the brook, sloping upwards, and through it at the higher end the water had worn a hole where several could sit with their knees touching; and the same fantastic water had wrought little basins and seats about it. This stone of knowledge was set in the midst of the garden, and an immense plot of rock-petalled water-lilies rose upon it, all of them without roughness and scented somehow, for the wonderful life which is in animals was behind the water, giving that, too, a mind. It was the mystic place of the fresh beginning of things. Here was the dreaming circle called Scorhill, which once had slept in the arms of a young and not far-distant moon; and there a stately avenue, with other great matters called neolithic, but really nameless. The gods were there in the likeness of stones; but there was nothing else to imagine.

Edith sat upon and half within the rock, but Mark would not join her. He stood upon the lower part; and above them a garden of fountains filled the air with music.

"I remember," she said. "You told me you must get inside, but they wouldn't have you. How did you manage?"

"There are many doors," Mark answered. "I got in by one at the side. The travelling did it."

"The Reverend Mark Yeo," she said.

"Yes, that," he cried proudly. "I promised not to mention it unless it became necessary. It is necessary. You gave me the start. I wanted to tell you, and to-day I had the chance. Here are my clothes, my Fursdon and English clothes, in a working-man's bundle, and I shall return to the village wearing them. I had determined to make the opportunity of appearing to you as I am. In this country I am a working-man."

"And in Canada?" she questioned.

"The door was open. I was allowed to take my place there, even though I am the son of a stone-cutter. Through you I wrote to a bishop of this country, and his answer was, 'You are not a gentleman.' Through you I went to Canada and found that there a gentleman is one who does his best."

"Tell me how you managed," said Edith.

"I found a big-hearted bishop and offered myself," said Mark. "After my English experience I was surprised at my welcome, but in a large country people grow large-minded. The bishop asked if I would give my life, and I consented if he would spare me five years out of it to do my work here. I told him what that work was, and he said——"

"What?" cried Edith, looking up as it was not right for her to look.

"I will not discourage you—but go."

"It was good of him."

"No, it was natural. He is one of the holiest men living," said Mark reverently. "His name will never appear in the list of bishops who have resigned their Colonial sees. He

will stay with the plough. All that he asked of me was to pass here as a layman."

"Why?"

"Because he had been deceived by men, no higher than myself, who wanted to better themselves and felt that a good way was to become ordained and then return to England as clergymen. He did not want it to be known how easy it is to get orders where men are wanted. Besides, he thought I should have more freedom as a layman, and he added, as if to himself, 'You are less liable to incur the enmity of the English clergy.'"

"What did he mean by that?" asked Edith quickly.

"He meant, I think, that any incumbent would be furious with a strange clergyman who came into his parish to do the work which, for various reasons, he would not do himself. He guessed perhaps that if a bill to prohibit the brewing and selling of intoxicating liquors was to be introduced the people would not oppose it."

"What prevents it, then?" asked Edith.

"Gold and silver on the one side; indifference, stupidity, nervousness upon the other. Every time a man gets drunk the country commits a crime against him."

"But the country is getting more sober," she said eagerly.

"The town is," said Mark pointedly. "It is the fashion now to ignore the country."

"I went through Fursdon late one night," said Edith. "It seemed to me that everyone was drunk. I wanted to get a parcel from the carrier; but when I asked the way to his house I couldn't find anyone to answer me, and when I did get there the carrier was too drunk to understand what I wanted."

"I could tell you of worse things. The moral faculty is dying here, poisoned," said Mark; and more he could not say, because he had in his mind the newest form of knowledge produced by education, a thing beginning, the coming of free and barren love.

"Tell me a little about yourself. Sit down. Here is a

stone chair in which an arch-druid might be glad to loll. Tell me about the future."

"How far ahead?" he asked, trying to shake the gloom off him, for the future is always terrible to the prophet.

"Beyond the five years."

"The fatal period," he muttered, thinking of Patience, and wondering if Edith had heard. "You are going too far. A great general could conquer the world in five years."

"Now it is four."

"And I have succeeded in making everyone hate me."

"I will not talk of the present. I want to hear about the end of the period when you go back to Canada," said Edith. "What is that life to be?"

"Too easy. I shall have my mission, a little wooden church, a congregation of sober, hard-working people. No better, no kinder, exist, but they don't require a clergyman," said Mark firmly. "In those very places where missionaries are sent there is often no vice. The heathen and the savages are here, in this country. What is the use of preaching to the converted? I have been sent to the tents of heathen Indians and found them leading good and moral lives, free from almost all the vices of this Fursdon. What am I to say to them? Change your lives. Are they to change what is good, and if they do change must it not be for the worse? I have seen them changed," said Mark, "into liars and drunkards."

"You know," said Edith softly, "this will never do for the world. I should like you to look upon the future as a rest and reward," she went on. "If you regard it in that way you will be happy, and to wear a smile instead of that frown."

"Ah, the doctrine of looking happy sounds a good one, but it is selfish," he answered. "It is simply an acknowledgment that pleasure is the only god worth following. How is it possible to smile when, as I go along the road, I am sure to see some dirty woman coming out of one of the inns with a jug beneath her shawl?"

"Don't talk of the ugly things," cried Edith. "Not here. Now, if you listen—— "

She put out her hand for silence, leant forward, looking frail upon the rock, and her face seemed as if there was something hungry behind. "I hear laughing, down in the little green pools of bubbles and splashes. Every splash is a laugh, and the bubbles are dimples."

"I hear bells," said Mark, "like those which ring off Boscastle beneath the sea, the bells of wreckers."

"Then look higher," said she. "Was there ever in the world such colour?"

The flat rocks went away in flight upon flight up the bed of the brook, and between them stuff called water spouted, but not the water of prose-life, flat and dark; here all was white, giving forth breath and life. There were a hundred fountains behind the living rocks—good word that living—white, like liquid mercury, and the spray from them was as pollen from the willows blown about. It was the beautiful vision which makes men and women feel unexpectedly, and so briefly, that life is excellent, the deed is possible, good is easy; gives them the quick, joyous flush of faith; lends them greatness. This thrill, which is everything but real, comes to every one, especially to those who would love well and to those who would think well. It is false, because it reveals too much, and neither lover nor thinker can reach high enough. Each sees and feels, then hurries off from the fountains in the rock, from the bed of white flowers in the moonlight; but, with the mistress in his arms, or the pen between his fingers, what is he but a man again? The divinity has trickled out of his clay. The fruit remains upon the top of the tree. And yet it shows there must be a soul-world somewhere, for the mind has felt it.

A thing of the soul is this thrill, and colour is the soul of beauty. "There is no name to it," cried Edith, and she spoke well. She was in love with heroes, giants, and great romances. She was in love with the gods, and good.

"I see it," cried Mark. He, too, leaned forward to have

the vision and the joy of it, which did not last, for something was with it. "I have no right," he murmured.

"Did you feel anything?" asked Edith eagerly.

"I felt as if something inside me awoke and asked, "Is it time?" and a voice answered, "Not yet. Go to sleep again."

"I dream," she said, "but you must not." Then she said, looking at him, "How you must have worked!"

He made no answer, and she went on admiringly, "The first time I saw you I was afraid. You seemed to me like any other countryman until you spoke."

"Even then I could not speak my own language."

"Didn't you find it very hard?"

"Harder than I expected. I was ill once, and after that everything seemed to come to me."

"What made you ill?"

"I am not strong."

Edith went on questioning until she learnt the history of those months spent over books, the days and nights fighting with the remorseless thing knowledge; how to prevent himself from falling asleep he would plunge his head into cold water.

"The Sunday holiday kept me going," he said. "I used to drive forty miles to take services."

"Some clergy would call that work," she said.

"Well, the weather would be bad sometimes," he admitted.

"I call it magnificent," she said. "It is a gospel of hard work."

"And nothing to show for it," said Mark, for the colours had gone and mist came instead.

"You don't mean that," said Edith. "If you had done nothing more than lift yourself it would be great; but you are lifting others. I am sure of it. You are stirring men in spite of themselves; digging stones out of their dull holes, like your old father."

"The granite will kill him in time."

"He has beaten it for a long life. It is better to be crushed at once than to wear away. You are stronger than your father.'

"He would never let me work with him, because I was not strong enough."

"But you can lift men."

"There is not one," cried Mark, "not a man in this country whom I have lifted."

"Your brotherhood," she reminded him.

"It is a failure. Its members are drawn from the ranks of the converted, good sober souls like the Rescorlas, or from the thoughtless, who look upon the matter as a joke."

"There is Church Beer, the centre of your movement," she went on. "Yes, I know it seems a failure, but you are only beginning; you are clearing the ground. Everyone fails at the start, but those who fight on will win."

"When the parson finds me at work and says, 'This is my land you are clearing,' and when the squire comes along and says, 'These people are mine——'"

"Don't listen. Fight on," cried Edith. "You will win, because you must. Mr Vivian is with you. So is Gerard. Why do you frown?"

"Mr Vivian is not with me."

"How can you say so? He has given you money and has promised more."

"I have to look upon both sides. You can ruin a poor man by giving him an elephant. By the act of giving you can take away. If I give a drunkard a bottle of brandy, what am I taking from him? That night of the meeting I learnt that Mr Vivian was an opponent."

Edith flushed, and was almost angry with this stubborn man, who would not recognise his friends. Excellent as her character was, and perhaps on account of it, she could not read the characters of others; she took them literally, and could not translate them. When Gerard succumbed to temptation she shrank in horror, not from his character, but from his deed; and she did not guess that the character was behind the deed and the cause of it. For the same reason she was offended with Mark, thinking him ungrateful, looking only at

the deed, and not having the depth of mind to find the cause. Edith was typical of her generation. When the stream was polluted she wanted to work hard and bale the dirty water out. It did not occur to her to search for the cause of pollution and remove that.

"You will not say Gerard does not help you?" she said; and then, as Mark did not reply, she answered herself, "Of course he does. He took the chair at your meeting;" but Mark only watched the waterspouts until Edith became restless, and at last she said, "You are not friends now?"

"He does not give himself," Mark answered, and Edith pondered. When asked for manhood and his soul Gerard would give weakness and a vice, believing they were himself; perhaps they were; but if so—why, this was not hard rock but water running through the fingers, and not battling water which had made the boulders smooth, but stagnant stuff, unable to free itself, never reaching the plateau of rose-colour.

"Gerard has done a great deal," she said firmly. "He is as bold as you; now isn't he?"

Mark looked at her, saw those shadows beneath her eyes threatening to get darker, saw also that perfection of face and figure and all those little glories which illuminate the loved woman. He could not hurt her, that were a greater sin than lying, so he answered nothing.

Edith in her heart admired Mark more than Gerard, and yet neither of them came up to her standard, for her mind was full of Olympian deities who could nod the world straight, and she desired her men to be like them, forgetting that deeds of strength are as natural to omnipotent beings as acts of weakness are to mortals. Therefore she admired Vivian, whose careless strength seemed so irresistible, and again made the mistake of regarding the man and ignoring the position which made him, so far as power went, what he was.

She left Mark almost abruptly. There was something about him which frightened her. He had managed to bring his dark images into her life, and she had enough without them, and

when she went away his place in her heaven was lower than it had been. The lowly influences of his birth could not be restrained. The morbid tastes of his class kept rising to the surface. He could neither look nor think cheerfully, his frown was constant. So she thought, without seeing that these things covered the very character she was in search of, that Mark's frown was the sign of that steadfastness of purpose which she attributed to Gerard's smile.

"Do I love Gerard enough?" she murmured, stopping to gaze at a queer little oak which never grew and never died, but managed to exist somehow between two rocks in the form of a problem, because, though its existence was not necessary, it seemed to be immortal. "Or do I want to escape? Perhaps I hardly know," she said quaintly. "Here am I. Mrs Allen is this rock, and the world is this one, and Gerard is the oak between them. I hate you," she said to the Allen rock. "I know so little about you," to the world rock. "And as for you, poor diseased only-just-alive tree, I should like to dig you up and plant you in a nice garden, where you could learn to grow. Then you would shelter me and shut out the ugly sights. That's pity," she reminded herself. "I am sorry for the little tree and I'm sorry for myself. Do I love it, and, if I do, is it because it could shelter me and shut out the ugly sights? Now I am getting to a hard catechism, and there is something creeping up called dimsy. It is all wicked selfishness, you know," she declared as she hurried on. "Perhaps I only want men to be sober and respectable, not for their own sakes at all, but just to make drunken Devonshire a nice place for me to live in. I shall tell Mr Vivian about those postcards," she added. "The brutes won't dare to send any more, if they know he is making inquiries."

Edith was to be given an opportunity for visiting the squire. The next day Mrs Allen took it into her head to go shopping, not that she required anything, but she had to pass the time in some sort of indolence, and there was always a fascination in entering shops and pulling things about. Mrs Allen had been

subdued lately; she had not assaulted Edith for some time; her health was hardly good enough, and Edith was getting stronger, she thought, more inclined to retaliate and rebel against wholesome discipline. There was also another good reason: a kind of lassitude was over Mrs Allen, which was due to a happy discovery that the pleasures of life were not used up, there was still something "to do," a fresh avenue of pleasant sensations to be exploited. She had exhausted the possibilities of religion, had slaughtered good specimens of every living creature not yet extinct in the local fauna, had used up all the "nice feelings," which included walking upon the gravel of the drive with bare feet, a popular pastime for a period among her decadent friends; and now it was borne upon her that the best gift of the gods to suffering humanity had remained until then undiscovered. At the eleventh hour, as it were, the crown of life was to be granted her, something prepared from the leaves of a shrub, a stimulant, a narcotic called cocaine. It was the old story, if the shrub had not been created to give happiness to mortals, what had it been created for? Such matters as use and abuse partook of the nature of metaphysics to Mrs Allen. Her brain could not deal with them, but it could respond to the drug, and wonderfully well, for she said witty things to her friends and composed clever prayers—for Mrs Allen was a pious woman—and she had wonderful dreams straight from heaven, and sometimes she thought seriously of writing a great book, but that was too laborious a deed, and besides she couldn't spell the words.

So Mrs Allen went shopping, Edith accompanying her to carry bag, purse, smelling-salts and drugs, and all manner of parcels. She slept in the carriage, and was permitted a vision of angels ascending and descending. She slept again during the railway journey, and was granted another vision. Upon the streets of Plymouth it was not lawful to sleep; but if she was not able to command a vision, she could at least entertain strange ideas. It occurred to Edith that Mrs Allen was behaving strangely in the shops. She moved in an unpleasant

fashion, there was a horrid expression on her face, a beastly cunning in her eyes, a certain nervousness when any assistant came too near her. "Keep by me," she went on saying. "Do exactly as I tell you—and remember I'm not feeling very well."

Edith obeyed, and presently she noticed that a shopwalker, who was standing behind a pile of goods, seemed to be watching her in an offensive way. She turned, and at the same moment Mrs Allen said angrily, "Don't move. You have spoilt it."

"What is the matter?" asked Edith.

Mrs Allen went on to another counter, upon which were baskets of fancy-work, and said, "Stand here. Near to me. Put your arms out, as if you were going to arrange your hair."

Then Edith saw what was going on. She looked round, almost ready to cry out, perceived the shopwalker again, and knew now he was not looking at her.

"Oh don't!" she cried faintly, as the man came suddenly striding towards them.

"I must request you to come with me, please, madam," he said in the voice of cold politeness.

Then there was a scene. Mrs Allen lost control over herself; she was strong enough; it was Edith who was half-fainting as the shop-assistants came round and customers walked up to stare, and presently a policeman entered the shop, and Edith was conscious of some one pointing, and saying, "Over there." She knew that Mrs Allen was being conducted into a private room, and she followed, glad to get away from the contemptuous eyes, and saw the search, saw the stolen goods disgorged, heard the manager's voice saying, "This is not from our establishment," and heard also the criminal's angry retort, "It is all a vile mistake. I was going to pay for them. Give me my purse, Edith."

"Is there any charge against this young lady?" asked the practical policeman.

"You may search me as much as you like," said Edith, waking up.

"There is no charge against you," she heard a bland voice saying, and knew somehow it was the shopwalker. "We should like to know what other shops this lady has visited, as some of the articles do not concern us."

"I didn't know what I was doing. I don't believe now that I took them," cried Mrs Allen wildly. "She may have taken them," pointing to Edith; but the shopwalker said quietly, "Madam, I saw you take two articles."

"I am not responsible for my actions. I will pay anything you like. For God's sake, Edith, say something. Haven't I had a neurotic temperament ever since you have known me?"

But Edith had nothing to say in defence, and, even had she been disposed to speak kindly, the loathing upon her face would have gone hard against the culprit. "I don't know what you mean," she began; and guessing that worse was coming, the miserable woman rushed at her, pulled her across the room to a corner out of hearing, and began to string together the whisperings—

"Say you did it. Confess you stole the things and passed them on to me—that I didn't know you had taken them. I'll give you anything, do anything for you. I'll help you to marry the curate, I'll pay your rent, I'll give you a regular income—only swear you did it. I have a reputation. Every one knows me. I can't get at any of the magistrates here. They will treat me as if I was a thief, a poor woman, something common. It's not as if I was at home, brought before my own friends. You are nobody, Edith. You haven't got any reputation to lose. You are—hardly a lady, you know; a week in prison wouldn't do you any harm, and I'll make it all up to you. I'll see that you lose nothing, and I'll come and swear you are not quite right in your head sometimes."

"We do not wish to detain you, madam, if you will kindly leave your name and address," said the manager, coming forward.

"It's all right," gasped Mrs Allen. "This girl has confessed.

She did take the things. She is only my companion, and I took her without a character."

The woman was obviously beside herself if she thought Edith's aid could be obtained in that way. The speech was so foolish that it was almost unnecessary for the girl to say, "She is lying"; but she knew by one furious glance what a war was being declared, and she began to count her friends on the fingers of one little hand and wonder where she could find a home. She heard the words, "The lady refuses her name and address," and she gave them composedly, while Mrs Allen collapsed and made herself a public nuisance.

How they got back Edith hardly remembered, but she was conscious the whole time how glad she was people were all about them, first in the streets and then in the train. She dreaded that privacy which must begin the attack. Mrs Allen said nothing, except that she should never live through it. She groaned, smelt salts, and wept privily; and when the station-master opened the door for them at the end of the journey she implored him not to believe anything he might hear about her, because it wasn't true. She raised the same cry to the coachman, then entered the carriage, and, as Edith was about to follow, she pushed her back with a few expressions, of which "thief" was the loudest. The carriage drove off, and the girl stood in the dust, with a few sniggering faces behind.

Mrs Allen was right when she said she had a reputation to lose and Edith had none. If any evil had been committed the dull fellows at the station guessed who was the culprit: not Mrs Allen, who was a lady of property, but her companion, who, as was so well known, met men in a certain dark and secret wood.

"I would rather they threw stones at me than laugh behind their hands. It would be more honest," was Edith's comment, as she walked away burning with shame. "Poor child!" she murmured. "Now there will be something like bloodshed. How helpless a girl is! A man puts his clothes into a bundle, walks off along the road and finds fortune somehow. Mark

Yeo goes away a farm-labourer and comes back a gentleman. Oh, thank God for green ferns!" she exclaimed, having passed the curve in the road and seeing a cool lane where the soft fronds waved. She went up it a little to get rid of that heat and to rub the dew on her pretty, sad eyes. "I'm so tired. It is nasty of her to make me walk six miles."

Edith tried to think as she walked on, but could not. Nothing came except the stupid idea that she was a handsome girl, and, if that was so, she ought to be pampered instead of persecuted; but perhaps she made others nervous of her. She spoke too boldly, and looked for too high a standard. All that walk she could not think of Mrs Allen. Her own poor little self pushed that creature out of the way, but indirectly her mind consented to refer to the day's events, and she found herself saying, "I must go and see Mr Vivian. I shan't say anything to Gerard. I won't humble myself and crawl."

Reaching the end of her journey, which did not mean home, she entered by the back-door and came upon a scene of quiet confusion in the kitchen. Mrs Allen was lying down, had taken stimulants, said prayers, sent for the doctor, and had also made it known how she had been unjustly accused of appropriating goods.

"I suppose she told you I am the thief?" said Edith; and the cook, who was not unfriendly to her, admitted this was so; but, as Edith was going up to her room, she followed, and whispered in the darkness of the stairs, "If I was you, miss, I should keep a good stick handy."

Edith went into her room, took off her boots, and rested. Presently the cook brought her something to eat; and afterwards she felt better, but a suspicion remained that something was going to happen, for Mrs Allen would be probably under the influence of stimulants, the doctor had not arrived, and in that diseased state might be actually not responsible for her actions. Edith put out the light, but could not lock the door, for the key had been removed, owing to her unscrupulous use of it. Her bed seemed dangerous, so she tried to make herself

comfortable upon two chairs near the window and drew the curtains across them. The night was perfectly dark.

There had been noises the whole time, deep groans and strugglings, suggesting gradual suffocation, and feet padded the floor irregularly; but presently Edith knew the sounds were in the passage. She heard the door open and felt the presence which she could not see. She was sure it was near the bed and bending down.

"Bessie," she heard in a sharp whisper.

Edith started up inspired, put her head out between the curtains, and answered, "Yes."

"You know that blue flower which grows beneath the dining-room window?"

"Yes," muttered Edith.

"In the morning go and dig it up. Bring me a bit of the root. It is good for headaches."

"Yes," said Edith.

"Miss Edith is probably going away. If you don't see her about, you will know she has gone."

Edith did not answer, for she was feeling sick.

"Do you understand, Bessie? Miss Edith has got another place. She may go off at once. I don't want people to know she has gone."

"Yes," the girl managed to murmur; and the door was shut, and the groans and strugglings went on again as if a lot of evil spirits were wrestling.

Mrs Allen had come into the wrong room. Bessie was her maid, her favourite, whom she trusted; and the name of the blue flower was monk's-hood; and there were some horribly dark and secret cellars underneath that house.

CHAPTER XVIII

ABOUT THE SYSTEM AND THE STANDARD

It was a day of searching rain, which passed down the moor in cloudy shape, darkening the rivers, awakening a thousand runnels among the hills, to drench the valleys beneath; a day when the turf-cutters had to make themselves shelters, those simple, chair-shaped huts of stones, roofless and open, but a defence against the weather, for upon Dartmoor rain drives and never falls in straight lines: a day also of melancholy, for human nature will be glad under a bright sky, and sad beneath black clouds; and laughter and snakes are both alike in their love for sun-scorched rocks. Summer borrows days from November, but pays them back when the time comes with an unexpected shower of gold. Few consider the sadness caused by the wet day, the amount of human misery provoked or added to by rain; the slushing through mire, the depression, the oozing of banks, the eternal leaf-drip, and the malice of the wind which drives those clouds along.

Edith opened her window to see if there was any hope in the distance; but the mist was full, and the world ended at the first terrace. She dressed, putting on her oldest skirt, for she knew there would be walking that day, went down shivering as she touched the damp woodwork, looked out of the dining-room window. The clump of monk's-hood had not been disturbed; the spikes of bloom nodded reassuringly. It was strange, thought Edith, that so much beauty should arise from roots of a deadly poison. She was calm and strong again; and as she stood at the window an idea occurred, she could

not resist it; she put out her hand, wrenched off a spike of the purple flower, fastened it into her blouse, and then went towards Mrs Allen's room.

She walked up and down the dark passage, listening to the rain, hearing nothing else until footsteps sounded below. She hurried to the door, knocked, opened it; Mrs Allen was sitting up in bed scrawling notes in pencil; her face and distended eyes told a good deal concerning the night and what she had taken to make her sleep.

"I thought I had better see you," said Edith, coming forward to the bed.

Immediately the door opened Mrs Allen saw, not Edith, but the thing she was wearing. What had happened in the night she could not remember, but she did know that during the drive home she had thought of some plan for getting the girl out of the way—although, of course, not that—and upon reaching the garden had seen the monk's-hood and remembered what she had been told about it, how that its root contained the active principle of aconitine, although she could never dream of making use of it. Mrs Allen was not born to be bad; but the cursed idleness of her life had done for her; that, too much money, and a complete disdain for what she regarded as the lower order of beings, had made her bad. Unhealthy tastes, the society of fools, nothing to do, a desire to shed blood, the reading of books which described murder as one of the fine arts, and those drugs and waking nightmares—even a strong mind would have been shaken.

"Call Bessie," muttered Mrs Allen.

It seemed to her she had given Bessie an order; but she didn't like to think about it now it was morning.

"I want to speak to you about yesterday," said Edith, protecting herself by means of that spike of bloom.

"I must see Bessie. Where did you get that thing?" cried Mrs Allen fiercely.

"This flower?" said Edith quietly. "Why, I picked it. Don't you know it grows just beneath the dining-room window?"

Memory was at work in its subtle way, and it seemed to the frightened woman that either she had uttered those very words lately or that someone had spoken them to her.

"It is good for headaches," Edith went on.

"Did I say that?"

"When?" asked Edith.

"Just now. Did I say it was good for headaches, or did you?"

"I did. I suppose somebody told me."

"Did you dig it up? Don't you know——" Mrs Allen stopped and tore a piece of paper furiously.

"I picked it," said Edith. "Why should I dig it up?"

"I had horrible dreams. I don't remember them now. Look here, Edith—I can't think of anything. I hate you, Edith."

"I know that, Mrs Allen." Those years of young life, slaughtered like nestlings by a cat, passed before Edith in a procession of ghosts, and she gave way to her anger. "You hate me enough to——" she unfastened the spike of monk's-hood and threw it on the bed.

Mrs Allen did not make a noise. She sat and stared, and stared and shivered. It was one thing to contemplate a crime and another to think of the consequences. Presently she said in a dazed and stupid voice, "What were you doing in my room last night?"

"I did not come near you."

"You heard me talking in my sleep. If it had not been for you I should never have been found out."

"You told me I had no reputation. I was a nobody," said Edith fiercely.

"Well, I spoke the truth, as you will soon find out. I'm not going to keep you any longer, and I won't give you a penny. When you find yourself out in the rain without a home to go to, you may be sorry for yourself."

Mrs Allen did not speak in her usual vehement way, for she was stupid with drugs and was frightened by the purple flower which looked like a venomous snake upon the bed; and she

had the sense to know that Edith as a witness could give damaging testimony against her; but hatred, as usual, won the day. It is a peculiarity among women of Mrs Allen's disposition that they imagine themselves to be the ill-treated ones and their victims to be guilty of the very faults they themselves have committed.

"I am a servant and therefore entitled to a month's notice," said Edith. "But I shall prepare my own food," she murmured.

Just then the doctor arrived, and Edith departed to her breakfast; and afterwards a message came, and she went to find her aunt in tears. Mrs Allen had never looked less formidable, but the evil spirit was there ready to curse.

"It's all out. Some wretched farmer was in Plymouth, heard about it, and has spread the report all over the place—and they believe I did it."

"Well," said Edith.

"You stand there and grin—you who were the cause of it all, you who gave a signal to that beastly man, and then said you saw me do it and gave my name. If I did take the things I didn't know what I was doing. The doctor says that's quite right, and he's going to give evidence that I have a neurotic temperament. He says I shall have to go before the magistrates and be committed for trial, just as if I was a thief, and appear at the assizes, and the judge may not be gentleman enough to understand that I didn't know what I was doing. You know, Edith, when I tore up your father's photograph I hadn't the least idea what I was doing."

"Well," said Edith again.

"Do you mean to say you don't believe me? You will be principal witness. What are you going to say?"

"The truth."

"Oh Edith, I implore you, I pray you for your dead mother's sake, do stand up for me. I know I have a beastly temper, I can't help being made like that; but I like you really, and if I had died you would have found I had left you—something. Tell a few lies for me. Say anyhow I was queer in

the morning, that you felt I wasn't responsible. Bessie is going to say that, and if you swear the opposite they may not believe her. We must stand up for each other."

"I am not going to commit perjury," said Edith.

"I am sure we have to tell lies sometimes. We can always repent afterwards. Edith, if you will stand up for me and I leave the court without a stain upon my character, I will make you a present of five hundred pounds. I will pay the money to any solicitor you like to name before the trial. You are the only one against me besides the shop people, and they don't know anything about the wretched state of my health. You shall have that money, and then you can marry as many curates as you like," she said hysterically.

It was hard upon Edith. On the one side liberty and what was for her a big sum of money, large enough to keep her in comfort until she was settled in life; on the other side nothing so far as she could see, for Gerard was only a curate, and in any case she had vowed not to marry him until the days of his purification were accomplished. Still there was no wavering; the memory of her sentence upon Gerard would alone have settled that; and there was something else which brought to nought the golden promise of the temptress—the standard, not the system of the villagers, the loafing, the drinking, the shirking of work, but her own standard of giants and heroes. Where would she be in her heaven of strong men if she fell below the standard which she had appointed for them? It seemed easy to follow the system, to lie with the doctor and the maid; but it was not easy, because it would destroy the standard and herself.

"If I am to give evidence against you I shall say nothing in malice, and I shall try to speak the truth," she answered; and Mrs Allen knew that sentence could not be shaken. So she began to curse and swear, and the evil spirit rolled out of her, black and grinning.

"Then I have done with you. Do your worst against me. I turn you out, you can go on the streets for all I care, and I

hope you starve. Yes, I did want to poison you, but you can't prove that against me. You only found it out by listening at my door. You will go from here without a character, and you can go to hell. I don't want your help, I have plenty of friends who will stand up for me through thick and thin. Take your beastly religious face out of here and out of my house. You want to be revenged upon me, and you call that religion—like your father who ruined my poor sister—a dirty, low-bred curate without a clean shirt to his back; and you—I can't find words to describe the filthy little brute who has sponged upon me——"

The evil spirit went on, but Edith heard no more. She went out, pressing a hand to her head, for that woman's face made her feel dizzy, then to her room and put on her walking things, only alarmed by one thing, and that her own face, which was almost ghastly, and her eyes looked bruised.

"It seems bad to-day," she said; "but it will be nothing this time next year. And now for the wind and the rain."

By the moor a mile was cut off, but half an hour was put on; the smooth road was both the longest and shortest way to Rose Ash. Edith had no doubts in her mind regarding Vivian's friendship. To him everyone in trouble went; she knew his kindness, remembering how he had tried to make excuses for Gerard's shortcomings; his cynicism was merely a cloak to hide the goodness of his heart: he was the sun of the village system, the sample of the standard, the big central figure which could not be cast down. That was how Edith regarded this juggler with the lives and souls of human beings. She was blinded by the position and wealth, and it was too dark in the passages of Rose Ash for the truth to be revealed.

Reaching the house, all wet and mud-bespattered, she felt nervous and did not like to go in alone. The squire would make such a fuss, want her to dry her clothes, have a meal; he would turn the place upside down to make her comfortable, and with Oriental hospitality would implore her to look upon the house as hers and himself as her slave.

Edith hovered about, longing for a companion, until an owl hooted and made her start. So damp and gloomy was it that the owl supposed it was evening; but Edith imagined that the bird was scolding her, telling her not to be afraid of the master who never suffered anything to be hurt upon his property; and then the man-servant, who was surely no human being but a monstrous toy made by the squire, for he seemed to be deaf, dumb, and blind, while he spoke, heard, and saw as much as he was wanted to, came along the drive and said to Edith, who was fumbling with the iron gates in a business-like way by this time, "Mr Vivian will be pleased to see you, miss."

The squire had been watching out of one of those dark windows, trying to guess what had brought Edith there, and, seeing that her courage was failing, had sent out the man to make sure of her.

"Now this is very good of you," he began at once. "You must have some lunch. What can I give you? I must give you something to keep the cold out. You shall take off your boots—indeed you shall, and my housekeeper must find you some shoes. Light the fire in the library, Willcox, and—yes, bring up the old port. Miss Gribbin must have a glass of the old port to keep the cold out."

"I am alone, Mr Vivian. I ought not to come in, but I do want to have a talk with you," said Edith.

"We are in Fursdon parish fortunately. Anything immoral can be done in Fursdon. I hope I am respectable. I do try to be. I want you to have some luncheon. It will be such a pleasure to me, entertaining you."

While talking he was fussing about Edith, feeling her dress, brushing her down tenderly with his handkerchief, and a little dog was always running at his heels, very much of a mongrel, but fat and happy, an altogether different creature from the outcast which had sought hospitality and had found an affectionate master and a home that same day the Mosscrops had lost theirs.

"Come along," said the squire. "We will go into the

library, and I shall be delighted to hear your news. How is Mrs Allen? I like Mrs Allen. Now, you must not be afraid of me. I do have lady visitors sometimes, widows generally, who tell me how the house ought to be arranged. It is very good of you to come and see me in the rain. I like wet days. I stand at the window and listen to the water splashing. I am really a very contented and middle-class person."

Edith went, understanding that it would be difficult to disobey this amiable man, and was glad to be seated, warming her feet and hands; and her next task was to refuse the various liquors which were forced upon her for the sake of her health. "I have never tasted wine in my life," she said.

"Really most people could make your confession. Hosken, whose article of faith is one bottle a day, drinks a port which would burn me to death; but the poor thing knows no better, and his palate is ruined now. He dined here one night and almost abused my wine. I have not forgiven him yet, at least I have only forgiven him as a duty, not as a pleasure. I should very much like you to try the old brandy," he said almost wistfully.

"Do you want to make me drunk?" asked Edith with a sad smile.

"Well, it would be quite an orthodox proceeding for Fursdon. I am so afraid you will take cold and die. You young girls have a silly trick of dying. I don't like people to die, and I don't like drunkenness either," the squire went on. "There is too much of it. I don't know whether it is the fashion in other parts, but here, when a man wants to thank God for any blessing bestowed upon him, he gets drunk. I think that is rather crude. It shows so little imagination."

Edith roused herself; the warmth made her drowsy after a sleepless night, and Vivian, she knew, was a bad listener.

"Have you heard anything about Mrs Allen?" she asked, directly she had the chance.

"The last I heard she was trying to get some ferocious dogs for the purpose of enjoying a little private rabbit-coursing. I

don't care much for rabbits; but if it had pleased the Creator to turn me out as one, I should not have made my burrow in Mrs Allen's field. She has a trick of forgetting to be gentle. How am I looking?" asked the squire, roaming off again and chuckling. "I am stricken with a mortal illness, I am rotting away in wet weather and withering up in fine. I am immensely pleased with the idea."

"Are you really ill?" asked Edith, with a sweet concern which was wasted.

"It is a sort of joke between the Evil One and some unknown person that I am. It is rather a private joke and has amused me so much that I am putting on flesh. I hope there is nothing wrong with Mrs Allen. You will stay to luncheon. I think there will be something nice, for the cook was singing a hymn of praise just before you came, and a plain meal is usually prepared with a penitential psalm. I am so pleased with you for coming to see me."

"You saw me standing at your gate?" said Edith.

"I did, indeed."

"I was frightened," she went on. "Mr Vivian, I want your help. I am looking out for a situation. Mrs Allen and I have quarrelled and fought. I am turned out, and Mrs Allen is going to be sent to prison. I thought I would come and tell you the truth before you heard lies."

"Really," said the squire laughing, "I do admire your powers of compression. You have given me several columns of a newspaper in a few words."

Edith told him the story, and Vivian laughed more than ever and expressed himself as delighted with it.

"What a crumbling of reputations there will be," he said genially. "Mrs Allen robs shopkeepers, instead of allowing them to rob her, and loses her reputation in the eyes of those who have not yet been found out. She throws the blame upon you, and you lose your reputation. I rather like stealing when it is done honestly. Shopkeepers make fortunes out of it, professional men live by it. The business is perfectly

decent when it is done neatly; but if you bungle, the law has you, not because you are a thief, but because you don't know your business. Mrs Allen could have bought the things and then have refused to pay. That is the artistic way of doing it; but by lifting them off the counter and hiding them under her cloak she offends the law. I am afraid Mrs Allen is not a clever woman, and the law has very little sympathy for fools. Two of a trade never get on together."

"She is nearly off her head now. She wants me to tell lies about her, swear she isn't responsible, and of course I refused, and that means the end of me," said Edith.

"I think you ought to."

"What! commit perjury!" cried the girl.

"We never give ugly things their names. When a friend becomes a raving maniac we say he is not very well. When a man goes hopelessly bankrupt he is temporarily embarrassed. Yes, I think you ought to stand up for Mrs Allen. It is what is called playing the game. By speaking the truth about her you do no good, and only make yourself unpopular."

"But she is a thief, a common thief," cried Edith.

Vivian began to shuffle about the room, shaking with laughter. "No, no, my dear Miss Edith, it won't do, you must come into the world. It's no use standing outside among the angels. Mrs Allen is a lady, well-off, very well-known in the district, a sportswoman, a supporter of the church, a subscriber to charities. Her position renders it impossible for her to be a thief. Suppose I went into a jeweller's shop and slipped a trinket into my pocket, and suppose I defied the tradesman by declaring I had come to steal and I would steal, who would call me a thief? People would say I had done it for fun. Suppose I went into Hosken's house and made off with his silver candlesticks, who would convict me? If I went on my knees to the local magistrates and begged them to send me for trial, they wouldn't. I hold too many mortgages. People are always asking for a motive. They say it is impossible for anyone to steal for any purpose other than the

desire of gain. They practically deny the criminal instinct. You must become one of us, Miss Edith."

"You think Mrs Allen will get off?" she cried.

"I am quite sure she will. It will be argued that she has plenty of money, and can afford to pay for the things; and she has also that valuable asset known as the neurotic temperament. Being a lady, she cannot have criminal instincts; and because she steals a few articles she must have the neurotic temperament. The whole thing is very amusing," he added pleasantly.

Edith sat silent, crushed by a new burden, for Vivian had shown her another side to his character, and she was grievously disappointed and distressed. He was below the standard, he appeared to go with the rest, he was only strong in his own interests. It seemed to her that life was made up of artifice, each human being playing a game of cunning against everyone else, each wearing a mask and acting, nobody natural because that did not pay. The world had become dishonest, and the few honest people left were the criminals. Still Vivian was himself kind, she was sure of that, if goodness of heart went for anything. His cynicism was plainly directed against the system. He was not in favour of it, and only adopted it because it was "playing the game." And yet it was sad to find the image of stone supported upon feet of clay. Already his manner had changed towards her, and when she begged him to say no more about Mrs Allen but to advise her, he became reserved, then dropped his laughter, which pleased Edith for the moment, for she felt he was going to be serious, and he became a trifle hostile, or, if not that, indifferent. Though the squire had often scoffed at the idea of being a fine gentleman, he prided himself upon it, and the traditions of respectability were strong upon him; and it annoyed him to think that Edith was in revolt against her own class, desiring to break from it and to give evidence against it. Nor was it respectable for a girl to be homeless and without friends; it was a kind of poverty which seemed to him indecent. When

a distressed villager came to Rose Ash, Vivian would supply his stomach with a good dinner and his pocket with half-a-crown. He was sorry for the poor man who had got himself into difficulties, but he felt little sympathy for a girl of gentle birth whose difficulties were forced upon her.

"I should advise you to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, if you really do regard Mrs Allen as such. She is only weak—poor thing. She takes cocaine too. That will be very much in her favour. As she is related to you, there are bound to be quarrels, and I expect you take them too seriously. You should treat these matters as Hosken would tell you, if he spoke the truth, as religion, not as a game of croquet. I am always calling my servants damned fools, but they like me for it. You must go back to Mrs Allen, assure her she is a saint and a martyr, laugh at her temper, pay her back in her own coin if you will, only stay with her until you marry."

"It is impossible," said Edith. "I have not told you everything. I must go out and make my living. I would rather scrub floors than stay with her. Couldn't you recommend me as housekeeper or something of the kind?"

Vivian felt uncomfortable. He did not like a young lady to be talking of such low affairs, and at the same time sitting in his library. It was something like an insult, and her pretty pale face made no appeal, because he was blind to beauty unless it was that of a plant or shrub. He liked to talk with women, but always despised them. He preferred Mrs Allen to Edith, although he regarded her as much the biggest fool.

"You had better advertise," he said. "It is very easy to get a situation, but you take too high a view. I think you expect far too much. You would be wiser if you stayed with your aunt and played thunder to her lightning. A young woman of your lofty ideals won't find it congenial to be among the pots. How about that wedding? The living is not ready yet, as the pig-breeder continues to flourish. Instead of being a shepherd he is a swineherd, and has converted the church-

yard into a farmyard. But Spiller is going the wrong way to work if he wants that living. I promised it on the understanding that he pleased me, and he is good enough to decline now to have anything to do with me. Do you know how I have offended him?"

"Yes, it is my fault," said Edith. "I made him promise not to dine with you."

"But I like having him. Why should I be deprived of his company?" asked the squire in his blandest manner.

"Gerard has a weakness, as you know. He cannot resist your hospitality."

"He suffers from neuralgia and melancholy—poor fellow. I live here alone, but I never suffer from melancholy. So he has made a lover's promise not to dine with the ogre of Rose Ash?"

"Not that at all," said Edith. "He has promised not to drink wine, and if he dines here he is sure to give way."

"I hope you don't think I fasten him to a chair and pour selected brands down his throat?"

"You are not to blame. I have always said so. But Gerard easily gets excited. He likes wine unfortunately, and when it is offered he finds it hard to refuse. If we do marry it cannot be for some time," Edith added. "In the meantime I must do something to earn my own living. Now I must go out into the rain again," she said rather mournfully. "The world seems unkind to-day."

"The world has nothing to do with us. We make the world," said Vivian. "I am sorry you will not stay to lunch," he went on, no longer pressing her, for he wanted to be alone and mutter his own thoughts.

"If you hear of anything likely to do for me, will you let me know?" she begged.

"I will, indeed. Certainly I will try to help you. I shall write several letters to-day on your behalf."

"Thank you very much. There is one other thing," said Edith. "If you hear nasty things about me, you won't believe

them. I have been getting terrible postcards, the most loathsome things. They make me so wild, and I am helpless, for it's impossible to find out who sends them."

"They are quite common," said the squire. "Between you and me I believe Hosken gets these halfpennyworths of flattery sometimes. You should cultivate the habit of cynicism. It is most helpful."

"No girl can afford to lose her good name," said she proudly.

"This reputation is a fanciful kind of thing. Some people rejoice to be told they haven't got one, and I rather like the idea of going without one. Laugh at these postcards. Let them amuse you."

"I am afraid I am too serious," said Edith. "But if I am leaving here it does not matter."

"When you have lived as long as I have, you will know that nothing matters. What can I give you? I like my guests to have something to take away with them. Shall I give you some flowers?"

"Thanks very much. I can't very well carry them."

"But you must have something. You shall not be the first guest to depart empty-handed. You shall have a book. I will get you a book to take with you."

He shuffled back into the library, and presently returned to the hall with a small book wrapped in paper, and Edith was forced to take it, so that the reputation of the house for hospitality should be maintained; a reputation, which in the words of the squire, was a fanciful kind of thing.

Rain and wind met Edith on the road as if they hated her, and she had need to remind herself often how all this misery would be nothing a year hence. Hard weather makes a mile long, but wretchedness makes it longer. She had never supposed Vivian would defend Mrs Allen, and her impression was that he had done so; and then she remembered how annoyed she had felt with Mark because he had said the squire was against him; and somehow the idea went with

Edith that he was against her too. Was this hospitality a cloak, was the endless giving of presents a bribe; were they both an attempt to throw dust into the eyes which tried to look into his mind? Against the name of Vivian Edith placed a question-mark.

But the squire was too strong for her. When Edith came home at last, and entered as usual by way of the kitchen, only the cook saw her, and she exclaimed, "Why, miss, I thought you was never coming back. Missis said you had gone for good, and Bessie be packing your things now."

"I shall stay as long as I like," said Edith defiantly. "You know what has happened, I suppose?"

"I reckon I do, and as soon as missis be fit to talk to I'm going to give her notice. I'm not going to live with a thief. I come of honest folk, and lady or no lady she's not good enough for me."

Edith felt refreshed at hearing a decided opinion with some naked truth in it. "I am wet through and very hungry. I must change my things," she said, moving towards the door; but the cook hurried forward and stopped her.

"It ain't safe for you to bide in this house, and so I tell ye. If missis warn't off her head when she stole they things she's off it now, and she's got the gun in her room what she shoots rabbits with. You get out of here, miss, or we'll be having policeman along for something a cruel lot worse than stealing."

"If she is like that," murmured Edith. "But where can I go?"

"Get along to my home, miss. 'Tis only a little farm, Chagford way; but my folks will give ye a hearty welcome."

"I have hardly any money," Edith said painfully. "Would they trust me? I have a little jewellery."

"That's all right, miss. If us poor folk didn't trust each other the world would get main hard. I'll get you a bit to eat, and then you slip out, and I'll have your box sent over to-morrow. Cheer up, miss. I'll be dancing at your wedding before the year's out."

While Edith waited for her meal she opened Vivian's present. It was a very little book, printed in the eighteenth century, and entitled, *Aphorisms of Lavater*. He had, no doubt, taken the first small volume that came to his hand.

As there was a piece of paper folded inside, the book opened at that place, and Edith read the aphorism, "Good may be done by the bad, but the good alone may be good," and she discovered that the piece of paper was a ten-pound note. The squire was almost beyond comprehension. His gifts had to be accepted. This note was intended for her, as he had scrawled upon it in pencil the words, "For advertising," and she knew he would not take it back.

Edith was disarmed and conquered; her face softened as she murmured, "How very kind!" and Vivian's name went back without the question-mark into the list of giants and heroes.

It was all a species of corruption, had she known it, one of the moves in the game which Vivian was master of. He made no resolve to do harm. He had no intention of bringing ruin into the lives of young people, there was no active and malevolent devil about him; but he could not restrain his power nor yet his love for conjuring with souls, tossing them up and down to see how they acted, and if any fell and were damaged it was all in the game. He would continue to like them even when they were spoilt. The danger was in this—he thought himself master of his mind when he was its slave; and his mind despised and hated his fellow-creatures while his tongue declared it liked them. His tongue spoke from his heart when he said he would help Edith and Gerard; but his mind acted without words, remembered how amusing it had been to see Gerard drunk, how presumptuous the boy had been to refuse invitations, and it was angry with Edith for interfering and depriving it of its human toy.

Vivian enjoyed his luncheon and laughed over it. "Willcox," he called: "Send into the village and inquire if Mr Spiller will be at home this evening. If so, let him know

I will visit him. And he must have something. Let a basket of grapes be taken to Mr Spiller with my kind regards."

Then he patted his dogs and fed them, smiled at the torrents of rain, and observed that they would find out the weak places in every cottage roof, and paced his passages talking about matrimony, love, and children; poking his head into the musty rooms and, as usual, explaining to himself what they were to be used for on that day in the Greek Kalends when he took a wife; but what he did not do was to write those letters on behalf of Edith, because it was an act which his tongue had promised and his mind had never intended to perform.

Darkness and damp were upon Gerard more heavily than upon others. He travelled through the mud with a bundle of limp and lethargic things called parish magazines, forcing them upon those who would accept, and this mission was depressing. Every cottage seemed like an ark in water, and when the doors opened smoke poured out; and every interior had its old man or old woman grumbling; none of them cheerful, all mumbling about the end of everything, the dilapidation of themselves, and the splendour of the past. He went into the hovel of the Vids; it was nothing more, although it served as the seat of the magnificent George; a tall and narrow hut of cob, roofed with huge sponges of golden moss, and chickens were pattering in and out, fouling the place; and the slit of window was a gross caricature of a grocer's shop; a tin of biscuits, some candles and soap, and gaudy trade placards blocking the light out. George Vid did not require a parish magazine—thank God! He had quite recently descended to the local Jordan and been dipped among the trout to the accompaniment of great hymn-singing; and when the sins had accumulated he would go and be dipped again, the bigger the sins the colder the water; there was nothing like a dash of frost to kill a sin, and to be submerged during a snowstorm meant salvation.

In search of sunshine, Gerard went to the garden of the giants, but the black cloud was there too. Oli took a magazine, and

Eli paid the penny; but the big men were not happy. Life had not run smoothly since the Mosscrops had come there to dwell, for Timothy refused to change his spots; there had been Saturday-night tumblings among the flowers; there had been quarrels between him and Patience, and the brothers had interfered with their strong arms to prevent Temperance from losing what teeth remained. The Rescorlas were excellent old fellows, honest and sober themselves, but indifferent concerning others. They did not appreciate drunkenness, but recognised that any man had a perfect right to get intoxicated every day, weather and money permitting; only that man must not disturb them nor do any injury to their garden. Patience, too, was doing that which was evil. She would stand at the gate and smile in a stupid way as the men passed; young fellows were generally loafing about after dark, and there would be a noise of unholy laughter beneath the hedges.

"Mrs Mosscrop be a gude woman, but they others du what 'em likes," complained Eli; and Oli added, "Me and my young brother b'ain't peaceful now. Us ha' got a woman to look after we——"

"Her ha' got a man to look after she," chimed in Eli.

"And he ha' got a devil to look after he," said Oli.

"Get rid of them," said Gerard.

"That be what my young brother ses when my plants be smothered wi' green-fly. But it b'ain't so easy, sir. They sticks."

"They'm cuckoos," said Oli. "They comes and lays their egg in our nest, and now 'em wants to turn we out on't. They ses, sir, charity be cold, and so 'tis I reckon. Me and little brother be vair froze wi't."

Gerard went home and found a message awaiting him. The squire would be pleased to visit him presently, and the news cheered him a little. Dark weather, walls, and loneliness were taking hold of his mind. He was not a happy-minded young man, and the rain which meant discomfort to many was misery to him. He exaggerated it into a species of torture

sent to try him. That black sky became to him the frown of fate, and the cold wind was its blustering hatred. Heaven was against him: he was a failure; and he had meant to do so much, rise in the church, be a leader of thought, fight against cant, strangle those things which strangle religion, cut off the vicious growths as with a surgeon's knife, and above all things to speak out. But strength was not behind the mind; he had approached the mountain of established custom to remove it with a spade; he had proposed to cut down the tree of the system with a penknife. It was so simple to say, "I will lead. I will destroy this," before the work began; but when it was time, and he looked down upon a vast sea of calm impassive faces, caring nothing for him or his ideas, when between him and the goal towered the great unclimbable wall of indifference, what could any man do but lower the little banner, give up his weapons, and go into captivity?

Gerard knew he must get rubbed into the orthodox shape to fit the world, so he dropped the habit of plain speaking; he must win his ease, so he joined the majority. He had been shown his little hole in space and what atmosphere he displaced. If he had preached a Good Friday sermon then, he would have said it was not his duty to judge those who accepted Christianity but not its sorrowful side; and if the rector had died he would have told the congregation that their time would not produce such another man; and he would have refrained from adding, after the manner of George Vid, "Thank God."

But there are punishments for defection. It is hard for a man who is pressed to perform an unpopular duty; it is cruel that he should be born; but since he has come he must get through what he can. If he refuses he is a traitor, and he receives a traitor's punishment. He lives indeed in his body, but he dies spiritually. Those pre-natal instructions must be accounted for; why so remains a terror; and those who have heard small things may well be thankful; for to those who have heard much are the greater pain, the greater temptation, the greater punishment.

As Gerard sat in his lonely room, with rain streaming down the window, something came, as always through the body, a small thing, but like all small things, insects which make an island, trickles of water which begin a river, leading towards a great issue. It was a pain, nervous and irritable, in his teeth and head. It was enough.

A carriage rolled up and stopped. The cottage door opened, wind and rain entered, and afterwards a genial voice, "Spiller! Where is Mr Spiller? Are you in, my dear fellow?"

Gerard went to the door. A manservant was bringing a large hamper from the carriage; and then he brought another, a smaller one.

"I am so glad to see you," said the squire. "As you will not come and dine with me I have come to dine with you. Do not be disturbed, as I have brought the dinner. Where is your good woman?"

Vivian fussed about, giving instructions regarding the dinner, then rejoined Gerard, overflowing with kindness and good-humour and bringing an atmosphere of fellowship into the dreary place.

"A photograph of my little friend Miss Edith, an excellent one. I have seen her to-day. She seemed very bright and happy. A pretty girl. I like her very much. How are you, Spiller? I am afraid you are not very well. It is very good of you to let me come here."

"I am under the weather," said Gerard.

"It is a mistake to take much notice of the weather. We will draw the curtains and forget it. I think I have brought quite a good dinner. Really, it is very good of you to let me come and cheer you up."

It was not easy to answer, but no reply was necessary, as Vivian had a gift of rambling talk which never came to an end. When dinner was ready they sat down, and the squire laughed long and joyfully when he perceived there were no wine-glasses.

"It is evidently the rigorous order of this house to imbibe wine from tumblers. As I knew you would not offer me any-

thing to drink I brought it with me. I could not dine without my wine. I have brought some champagne, but not for you. It would be so good for your head, but you must not touch it. Miss Edith has been telling me what a very puritanical person she is making you."

"Did she tell you that?" began Gerard, and stopped.

"Something about knights and dragons," laughed Vivian. "I hear she has threatened you with all sorts of penalties if you aren't good. I don't like an absolute monarchy of that kind, but I suppose you young men enjoy it rather until you are married, and then you take your foot off the dragon and let the poor docile beast run about a bit. Does the order prohibit the use of a corkscrew?"

"I have one," said Gerard stupidly. The sight of those bottles gave him a certain pleasure. There was an easy way of forgetting the rain, that pain in his head, the forlorn and unwieldy thing called body. Why was Edith so severe upon him?

"You must not ask me to join you," he said.

"My dear fellow, I'm not going to dream of such a thing. Indeed, I prohibit you. I shall not allow you to touch the wine. Ah, that is the old brandy. Surely it was you who used to say—why, of course! You used to say it did your head good. I must request you not to go near it, or Miss Edith will be angry. Would you mind opening the champagne for me?"

Gerard did so, and the fresh scent of the wine bubbled up to his nostrils and made his face white. He returned to his seat, helped himself to cold, unsympathetic water, which brought no benefit to his head, and his longing for something which would make him laugh and talk—and forget—did not decrease.

"I ought to have brought you some mineral-water, but, to tell you the truth, I have no mercy upon teetotalers. They appear to me unsociable, almost unfriendly; and sometimes I ask myself if you men who drink water are really quite serious—do you deserve to be presented with livings if you will not dine with the patron?"

"I suppose all the clergy about here drink?" said Gerard rather wildly.

"Yes, I think so. I do not know of any teetotalers, but they are moderate men. The last of the two-bottle parsons died some years ago. I am afraid Hosken uses a large bottle, but then he has plenty of money, and it is after all poverty which gives people virtuous ideas. This champagne is quite satisfactory, Spiller. I am sorry you must not have a glass. You are looking rather unhappy. What can I do to cheer you up?"

"I always get neuralgia in this weather."

"A little of the old brandy would do you good. I really think you were foolish to make that promise. I never did like the idea of young men making vows. They are such brittle things. Pass me the bottle, Spiller, and do not help yourself," said the squire with his boyish laugh.

"I don't think Edith would mind, if she understood," said Gerard excitedly.

"You may be quite certain I should not tell her."

"What is the difference between a doctor's medicine and this?"

"Well, as a man who has studied medicine, I should certainly prescribe the old brandy for neuralgia and recommend it as a means to procure a good night's rest. Pass your glass, Spiller. No—I forgot. I cannot permit you to break your promise. I should like to see you more cheerful. Miss Edith has queer notions, and I don't care about the idea of petticoat government. Water-drinkers really do not make progress. A little of everything good, and moderation in everything. I am sorry you have been rather a damned fool, Spiller," said the squire lazily. "Smell this. Just put your nose to it. Perhaps the bouquet will do you good . . . ."

It was nearly midnight, and Vivian was being assisted to his carriage, murmuring in a satisfied way, "I like Spiller. He shall have that living. Decidedly he shall have that living when the pig-breeder dies. I am delighted with Spiller. He

must come and dine often"; and the subject of his remarks was standing in the little room, laughing, feeling very well, not unhappy; he swayed as he stood, almost overbalanced, and straightened himself with jerks. "Splendid fellow, the squire. Best friend in the world," he muttered as the carriage moved away; and then, reaching out his hand in a fit of uncontrollable devilment, he knocked something from a bracket to the other end of the room, not in the least knowing what it was, until the next morning he found Edith's photograph upon the floor.

CHAPTER XIX

ABOUT THE LIE

AFTER that night Gerard took the step downwards, thinking he could escape that way; but the lie is a cruel monster, for when one of its heads is cut off, nine others spring from the neck. The suffering which followed that night did him no good, because he emerged from it armed with cunning; he resolved to be a man of two lives, a hero out of doors, a beast at home. When Edith wrote, which she did after settling in her lodgings, he made up his mind it would be good for them both not to think of the past.

It was in some ways a cold and formal letter, but a pretty simplicity was in it. "Life has changed so much lately that I have to write, my dear Mr Spiller, to say that I want to meet you again. Don't think I am not mistress of myself, for I am, and just as much as, I am sure, you are master of yourself. I have not broken down, and when you see me you will find someone quite as erect and dignified as she who begged you to recover your real self, your Gerard-self, in the pine wood, and offered you a year to make the search. Am I the coldest girl alive because I freeze my heart and swear it shall not be thawed except by love worth having? Very likely; but I am afraid—your manner in the wood that day did make me tremble. Let us be mad when we are good, and wild when we have conquered. I thought I had throttled my bad little self, but when Mrs Allen told me I had no character, I saw horrid things, like red worms. I could have killed her; and so, you see, we have to keep ourselves in training.

"I have made a great discovery, and though wise men would laugh at it, I shall cling to it still. I have found out all the beautiful things in the world were created to make us good. I want you to go walks, please, Mr Spiller, and think about that. Go a little walk every day, not along the road, because men made that and it is hard, but into the woods, especially among the firs—those nice smells were given to make us good—along by the river, upon the moor. When you don't feel strong, go for a walk. When you feel troubled, go for a walk. And when the bad self rises and says, 'Have at you again,' go for a walk. Take all the worries and fears and temptations that are in you into the woods and toss them into the bushes, and they will sink into the peat like a lot of dirty water; and then you see the flowers and smell the soul of things and every little leaf whispers in the wind, 'How easy!' Among the trees it is easy to be good. It is no virtue at all, and if you will take the flowers and trees about with you—and though I have nothing of my own, I give you all the oaks in Teign woods—they will make you like themselves, strong and without thorns. Last evening I was walking in these woods, and I sat upon the logan stone—where I shall meet you—and cried, a thing I have not done for years. I cried for sheer happiness to find so much that was for me and so little that was against me, just as some people cry when they are touched with music. On one side all Nature, and against me one woman's ill-temper, a few countryfolk who don't know what they do, and one sorrow—there is no blame in this—and I realised that I had made no mistake when I made you promise. And I saw the sun going down at the end of the gorge, and the thick golden light came across the river, and then I thought to myself, people really want to be good, only they don't know the way. Nobody shows them the woods and the beautiful things; they begin and end their lives without knowing what good is; and so they get bad because they have never been shown the way."

There was more, for Edith had to say she was seeking a

situation, which might take her away from those parts. In the meantime, she was helping about the farm, feeding the poultry, and making cream which, she declared, was not good for the complexion; but she was happy, and if that life went on it was likely she would get fat.

At the appointed time Gerard went into the gorge of memories, for it was in the midst of it he had camped by himself, had traced out Edith's initials with glow-worms, had met the whistling sailor who was Mark. He seemed to have grown old since then. The solitude, once a friend, was now an enemy. He could not have sat in his tent and watched the water, and listened to the voices of the wood, where once had lived the genius of enchantment, where he had seen the flower-buds forming and the blooms breaking, and had learnt the language of the birds; for the golden age had gone by. That horror of Mark's was there, but not in the woods; it did not creep about in those green depths; it was in himself. And there was Edith sitting upon the rock.

"Do I frighten you?" she said.

The first word that he spoke, something loathsome seemed to drop from his mouth and fall between them; for he said he was not frightened, and it was a lie.

She held something doubled up, a hateful scrap of card, and this she unfolded and held out to him, saying, "I had it this morning. I cannot escape from my persecutors. Read it."

"You are a nice person, I fancy. We thought we knew what you was, but now they say you are a thief as well as a ——. As for that young curate, he has been drunker than an old sow."

That was a postcard written in a bold, round hand, so that nobody should miss a word.

"Is there any truth in that?"

"No," said Gerard.

"I want you to look up—into my eyes. Is it true?"

"No," he cried.

"I believe you," she said; and then slipped off the stone,

which would not log because the weather had made it fixed, and asked, "Are you tired?" in her gentle way; and Gerard answered "No"; that being the word he had brought with him, though he was always tired in those days.

"Then we will walk through the gorge. Don't you find it easier to think when you are walking? When I stand the river and the ferns make me dream."

Only the water travelling faster than themselves told them they were going downwards, for the rough path went often upward, and it was narrow, so that they could not walk side by side. Edith went in front, and Gerard, looking now up, then down, and often stumbling, saw the little boots rather worn at the heels, and the neck where the soft hair grew luxuriantly from the pleasant ground of sun-browned skin. When her head half turned he saw the profile pale against the green oaks, as cold as the river, as hard as the rock; and he did not know that the coldness and hardness were upon the surface as weapons of defensive pride. Gerard could not understand this mind which treated him with apparent contempt until he should rise to the height required; for love was to him something aggressive, and its possession wiped out every fault. If a man loved well, surely there could be no fault in him. He did not go on to argue that if a man cannot conquer himself his love is vain, a thing of weakness, and nothing better than a lie.

"Won't you call me Gerard again?" he urged.

"Oh no," said Edith. "A contract is no good if any part is broken. Not until next year."

"You are very hard upon me."

She walked more slowly before she answered. "If you will turn that remark inside out you will find some selfishness in it. You have been hard upon me. I am alone, fighting my own battles."

"I am alone too—without you."

"A man can never be alone in the sense that a girl is. Men help each other. Women hinder each other." Then

she went on to speak of her plans. "I have advertised for a situation as companion-help, preferably to a lady not very strong. I don't want to be beaten," she smiled. "Besides, I like looking after weak people. It seems my mission. I can guide better than I can follow, and I believe I have it in me to make others happy, if they will only be obedient. So many people refuse to be happy because they will rule themselves."

"You may be going right away from here."

"I hope not. My interests are here. My beech-tree," she murmured. "And you."

"Then I am an interest?"

"Why, you are the first interest. You ought to know that," she said coldly.

"Edith——"

"You must not. Do you want to make me angry and leave you? I will not give way," she said in her hardest voice.

"I should feel so much happier."

"I don't want you to feel happy yet. I mean, I want you to be sorry. I believe this year of—well, misery let us say, will be the making of us both. Look upon it as a bad voyage, and don't blame the compass. There are calm seas and favouring winds ahead."

They came out upon the bridge, crossed it—Gerard seemed to see in the dust the footprints of himself and Mark, those which had gone on and those which were backsliding—and they entered the wood upon the other side, where all was young and tender. They had passed out from the valley of rocks. Here everything was soft and dim, for the sun could hardly struggle through the leaves and only reached the ground by shooting his arrows through. As they went on it became deeper and darker; and so they passed in silence into the land of old romance, very far from the modern road, into the place where the stories come from, beside the long-deserted camps of charcoal-burners and oak-rhinders, where the old huts stood still, and in the garden of the wood about

them were rings of mushrooms. The light was green, and if smell can bear a colour that too was green. They had crossed the frontier and were walking in the country of truth, which some call the land of imagination, because the stories coming from there seem so impossible. The mind would not move in their direction, making out of truth a mystery like the beginning and end of things. It is not easy to speak a lie beside the deserted camp of the oak-rhinders. The shadows terrify; Nature is blowing in the organ-pipes, and the music is religious; and love becomes more dreadful, a longing not of man for woman, nor woman for man, but for that which such longing suggests, something higher, a union with the green shadow, marriage with a perfume, one breath mingling with another and passing together, making music.

"I must say this to you," said Edith at last: "if you do not want me, let me go."

Then Gerard looked up, and said in a simple way, "I must win you. I would do anything."

"Don't say that. I mean, if you feel I am not worth it, if you feel you cannot make yourself what I want you to be, let us end it here. I don't ask for freedom; I don't want it; but you know yourself—and I could be doing something else."

"If you would be kinder," he muttered.

"I should not take a situation and wait for you," Edith went on. "I could use myself better. I should offer myself for some work, where I could tell ignorant people of the beautiful things around them. Love is the first thing in life. I am sure of that, because it is the foundation-stone of strength, and you can put nothing in its place. But if you make me change my love I must. It is necessary to love; but life is not wasted if you love nothing better than the grass."

"If you would only let me call you Edith," he said, not seeing the sorrow on her face. This was to her sinful, a giving way instead of fighting. It was this weakness which made her doubt whether she ought to wait for Gerard, though she wanted him. Her foolish little heart was crying out for the

pale-faced, troubled boy in a simple, earthly way, but behind the heart was a resolution which was not little. If Gerard could not reach the standard, he must go, and better then than later.

"Come to me next year," she said, in a clear voice, sounding almost childish in the dárk wood. "Say, 'I have kept my promise, and I have come to claim yours.' You will not find me cold."

He turned away to hide his face from her.

"Am I worth it?"

"You know you are."

"Why, then, your way should be easy. Is it hard to be given a pleasant duty?"

"If you will not have me, I shall leave the church. I shall go to the bad," he said passionately.

"Will you, if I have to refuse you?"

"Yes, I know I shall. There will be nothing to live for."

"Except one girl," she said sorrowfully. "Everything thrown away because one girl remembers she has her being to think of. This is not learning the lesson."

"You would not be the ruin of me?"

"You are cruel to say that. If I married you now, I could not prevent you from ruining yourself; and if I married you next year, I still could not prevent you."

"I should never give way if I had you always with me," he cried.

"I am always with you."

"It is not enough. I want to see you."

"Is memory nothing?"

"It is not enough. When my head is bad, if you were only there to place your hand upon my forehead."

"Would it help you if I let you write to me?"

"A little."

"Only a little?"

"If I could see you in the room, follow your movements, hear you speaking——"

"You would not?"

"I should not be afraid."

Edith drew herself up, for she saw the enemy. "It sounds as if you were yielding," she said. "The temptation has come again. Well, of course, you simply get up and say, 'How fine it is to be strong and able to resist——'"

"Yes," he said eagerly. "Yes, I do."

"It comes again?"

"It keeps on coming."

"That shows you have been half-hearted," but Edith's voice shook a little, and she began to ask herself questions. Liars the villagers were, but they were also fools, and invented little; they simply imputed a bad motive and gave an ugly twist to every deed of innocence. The anonymous coward who had informed her about Gerard might possibly have built some lie upon the truth.

"You can only be afraid of a thing which is stronger than you are," she went on.

"I try my hardest," he cried. "You don't know how hard it has been. You do believe me?"

"I trust you. I am sure you would not deceive me. Why will you turn your back upon me?"

"I feel, I am always feeling, I cannot make myself worthy of you."

Edith came towards him. Somehow they had managed to place between them what had once been a wall, but a long time ago, for nothing was left except a few stones covered with moss. Gerard could have stepped across it, but he shrank back; and the old ruin of the wall divided them; and Edith put out her hand and touched him.

"Are you sure," she said earnestly, "are you quite sure that you have not in the smallest sense broken the vow that you made to me?" she said, still in the clear, almost childish voice, wonderfully pathetic. "Remember you are dealing with my life as well as with your own. If you are going down, you would drag me too. If your future looks hopeless spiritually, you

must not darken mine. Tell me truly now—perhaps you answered too quickly when I asked before—tell me, is there a grain of truth, is there any possible ground for the report that you have—you have been drinking?"

Could he answer that? Could he in the place of truth answer the girl whom he loved with a lie and bring her down with him? Could he drop from his mouth that loathsome word again? At such a moment calm thought was impossible. To answer with the truth meant losing her altogether, for Edith would never depart from her word. To answer with a lie, if it was possible, meant keeping her, winning her in the end; for he would not fall again, he would refuse; there was plenty of time and still a chance, and Vivian would not betray him. Gerard saw that. To answer with a lie meant also certain and ultimate misery to them both, and that he did not see. Once he looked up, saw a delicate face and those dark eyes suffering for him, he thought, not because of him. Possibly he did not know what he was doing; her hand was upon his arm, and it seemed to hold, to ask him to stay, desiring to keep him, seeming to say, "I cannot let you go. Even if you are wicked, I love you; I must keep you; I can make you strong."

In an instant everything seemed to pass by, all the evil deeds that had ever convulsed the world went sweeping through the gorge, and the leaves whispered in suppressed admiration. One deed made another, one life made another, one lie made another, and so on for ever; but a man must never look back. There was always a chance ahead; if a battle was lost, the issue still remained in doubt, the war was not over, victory might come at last.

So he lied.

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT THE DAY

It was night, and a dark figure came along the cart-track which ran beside a nameless brook. Figure and brook passed down together, and both made a noise as they went over the stones. Mark it was, and upon reaching the plats he turned, stopped beside what might have been taken for a stable, and pushed his head in. A roar received him, then a rock was thrown; but Mark forced the crazy boards back, went in, and the face of Job Lithern became a smile of magnitude. There was some bond of unity between him and the Yeos, and he was fond of Mark. He had thrown the rock in terror when he saw that face.

"You didn't know me," said Mark. "It's no wonder, for I don't know myself."

Job bellowed a welcome. On one side of the miserable shed was his cart, and he was sitting in it near a yellow lantern; he had been watching the queer shadows, for his eyes were good, and thinking, for his memory was keen. He saw granite rocks and thought in them; he reckoned every man by his capacity for splitting, shaping, and heaving, and he was thinking of the mass he was going to move that autumn; and the thought was a pleasure, because it was not work, but going to warfare, and that big mass which loomed up in the night outside represented the next campaign.

What Job tried to say was this: "You look frightened. You have been running. Is there anyone outside after you? I will take my hammer and go out to him"; but all that came from his throat was a noise that seemed to make the place shiver.

"I wanted to speak to someone who couldn't hear me, and I remembered you," said Mark. "I can say what I like to you, because you are deaf, and you can hardly see my lips moving in this light. Your name is Job, and it's a good name. I can talk to you in your own whirlwind."

Job, too, had a story to tell about his life, and the rocks which were left, and the walls he had built; so he too shouted parables.

"We knew each other before the accident which knocked the hearing out of you," Mark went on. "I used to run about with you, and throw snowballs at you sometimes. You were always a kind fellow. The end is coming, Job. To-night I am frightened. It's a glorious night on the moor, hardly a sound and no wind, with just enough light to bring out the flat rocks like tombstones, and enough water coming along to tell the weather. I went out to think for a bit, as to-morrow I've got to see the one creature that I hate, and settle the day when I am to marry her. I am making my confession to you, Job. I want the end to come, but I'm afraid of it. I have been a natural coward all my life, although nobody has suspected it, for I have fought against the weakness and knocked it under; but it's there. I'm afraid of every man, Job. It's an agony to me to stand up and face another; but I do it somehow, for I chip bits of strength off the granite as I go about, and use 'em when the time comes.

"That's one thing, and another is, I'm a blasphemer. Something buzzes about me and makes me curse my old father, my religion, everything I believe in and try to believe in. Those who call me Mark the Methodist don't know what I say to myself. When I stand up in Church Beer, I have it in my mind to preach a devil's sermon, to encourage every form of vice, damn all religion, but I can't do it, Job. Something else is there, something stronger than myself, and it puts other words in my mouth. I speak them, and am hated when I want to lie and be liked."

Job was roaring away, enjoying the good company, and

laughing at the thoughts of his own imagination. With his great noise he exaggerated and sought to explain that the rock he was about to attack was as large as Fursdon Church.

"You don't know what this life is. A viper might know, if it had a human mind; for when he puts his head out he gets trodden on. One year has gone, but there are not four more. There is not one. That is why I am running to-night, frightened by my own blasphemous self. This is as far as I have gone, Job. I hold meetings in Church Beer which are generally broken up. In every village I visit I speak from the cart. People listen; some laugh, others throw stones; but most are indifferent. Sometimes I speak in the chapels, but I only succeed in offending everyone, because I say what I hold to be true. I have the people against me and the gentry against me. Squire Vivian gives me money, then urges his men to go and listen to me, for he is sure they will be amused. To him I am a performing bear. The rector meets me and says plainly he shall apply for a summons to restrain me from inciting the people to destroy property. To him I am an anarchist. To-day I hear a plot is hatching to get rid of me. I know what that means. They won't use violence. They will simply make my life unendurable. I shall have to leave old Wreford. If I don't, his cart will be destroyed, or his pony maimed; and if I go home to Freezabeer my father will miss his tools, windows will be broken. I can't keep the curse to myself. I have to communicate it to others, like a disease. But I'm not going yet, Job. I'll do something. There are two I'm going to bid for, and I've sworn to have them—sworn it with curses, I daresay. I'm going to have the worst girl and the worst drunkard in this parish. I'm going to drag them out somehow. I'm going to have Patience and Joseph Boone. I'll win them before I go."

Job had ceased his noise. He was huddled in the cart, which was his bed, staring at Mark, and he picked up the lantern and warmed his face against it.

"You can't hear me, Job. You don't know much about

love, and perhaps I don't either. We are only beasts, and we feel. It was not until I felt—call it love, Job—that I began to blaspheme, for that was the stone which hit me. Is it hard to marry a girl that you must hate if you don't love vice, when your heart and your soul and your mind are poured out upon another, just as the river pours over the rock? Now I have told you. I'm a coward and a blasphemer, and I'm going to marry a wench who has never a clean thought—and I'm done for, Job. That's what I wanted to confess to someone who couldn't hear me, and that's why I was running to-night, looking for a place to hide myself. It was the terror of the end, the knowledge that I can't get away from the end; and I saw it, Job. It came rolling across the moor, big and dark like a wounded beast, with a great red hole in its side—and I ran from it."

Job began to bellow again, but in a different fashion. He had used his eyes, and could guess that Mark was talking darkly, and something within was warning him he could not be always a hewer of rocks, and an end would come also for him; and this is what he would have said—

"You are talking about unpleasant things. You ought to work with your father and help him clear the plats and do a man's work, and then you would be happy all the days of your life."

Mark went to the side of the cart and held the strange creature's hand and shook it, saying, "Good-bye, old Job Lithern. We may not meet again. They call you a savage, but if every man was like you, I should be taking my ease at home."

Then he went out, but Job was after him, the lantern swinging from his hand, and he would not leave Mark until he had lighted him across to the well-worn track.

"He and my good bishop," Mark said, "are the only two men who have offered me a light when the way was dark."

The next morning Mark went along Love Lane, passing the empty cottage of Blue Violet, the wet wood-stack and the

melancholy pump. It was the silent time of year, when the birds did not sing, but sat puffed out upon the branches taking stock of berries, and the brown squirrels were bustling to their holes with nuts. Birch-trees grew from either hedge, and their twigs met in a marvellous tangle and were bound together with barbed brambles. Half-way to the farm was a gate, serving no obvious purpose, and as Mark swung it open, he saw, huddled beneath the arched roots of an oak, what appeared to be a bundle of feathers. It was the dead body of the old stag-turkey.

"I believe he was glad to die," said Mark.

He dragged the body out with gentle hands, surprised at its lightness, for, now that life was gone, there was little left but feathers. The bird had starved itself to death. That was the idea which came to Mark as he felt the old sharp bones. Hating the farmyard world, and weary of its life, that portion of mind allotted to the bird bade it go and hide beneath the ferns, away from the racketing of hens and the vulgar tussle for grain, and there to die like an old Stoic, preferring suicide to surrender.

"I believe he knew," said Mark, as he walked on, carrying the bundle of feathers, "that Barseba meant to kill him, and rather than shame himself he died."

A smother of smoke was over the farm and pouring from the door where Barseba looked out to get some air. Seeing Mark, she came across the court, and he placed the dead body at her feet that she might pronounce an epitaph.

"So the old toad be dead," she said, kicking the feathers and finding no profit in them. "He wur no gude, and he hated I. Birds and beasts be born to du their duty. He don't leave no young ones. He never had none," she said disdainfully. "I'll get my spade and till mun into the garden. He wur no gude while he lived, but he'll mak' manure now he'm dead."

"How is the master?" said Mark.

"Be 'em telling about he?" asked Barseba, pushing the blackened hair from her eyes with grimy fingers.

"He wrote to me and said he was in terror of his life."

"He'm witched," said Barseba. "That's how it be. He walks under the hedges wi' his gun, and he don't mind how he shoots. Birds and rabbuts, they'm all alike to he. He fancies there be volk around to rob him."

"You know what he has up yonder?" said Mark, nodding to the old barn.

"Aw, them bukes," said Barseba tremulously.

"Nothing else?"

"Nought that I knows on."

"Money?"

"My dear soul, master ain't got a penny. Can't hardly find the rent, he ses. Money! I wish he had, vor I ha' worked and worked," said Barseba. "See they old hands, my dear. Be 'em the hands of an old woman whose master ha' got money put away?"

"Why is he afraid of being robbed?" Mark asked, hoping he might open the eyes of this simple old woman.

"'Tis the witchery on mun. Yew minds the day when yew brought Patty down along, and her throwed the bellows on the table—God forgive she, vor I wun't? Master ha' been mazed since then, he ain't hardly spoke to me, and he'm allus in the barn or scrattling about the hedges. I b'aint larned," cried Barseba, "and I be thankful I b'aint, vor 'tis a sure thing volk go to the bad when 'em larns figures. I knows one thing, Mark, I knows witchery be got by bukes, vor I seed a witch's buke when I wur a young maid, and he wur vull o' black writing. There be only one buke what b'ain't bad, and I takes he to bed wi' me to keep the witches out. So I ses to myself, 'Tis they bukes what be witching master, and 'tis they bukes what made Patty so bad.' I be burning 'em," said Barseba shrilly. "I burns a few every day. When master be scrattling under the hedges I goes into the barn and fills my apron. I be burning 'em now. Aw, my dear, I can vair hear they witches scream as the smoke goes up the chimney."

"Does he miss them?" said Mark.

"Well, I reckon he du. He don't sot no value on 'em, but he fancies volk be getting into the barn to rob 'en. That be the witchery, my dear. When the bukes be all burnt master will be free again. But he wun't get free till I gets hold o' they two what George Vid took away. Yew minds 'em, the two master gave to yew, and George wouldn't let yew tak' 'em? I reckons they be the baddest and blackest o' the lot. They wur vull o' black writing, both of 'em. I wun't get easy in my mind till I ha' burnt they two."

"One was the *Pilgrim's Progress*; but it was very old and dirty," said Mark. "I don't think that book could hurt the master."

"There wur awful writing in him," said Barseba. "Yew larned and knows how to beat the witchery, Mark, but us don't know. When I sees black writing, I ses, 'Put him in the fire. If he b'ain't witchery he b'ain't wanted, and if he be witchery fire be a brave cure.' God made one buke, Mark, and the devil made the rest."

"Shall I go and see the master?" said Mark, knowing that all the wise arguments in the world would not shake the opinions of Barseba.

"Best not. Let mun bide. He'm peaceful now, and if he sees yew he'll get mazed and be upsot all day. Wait till all the bukes be burnt. There be awful wicked pictures in some of 'em," she muttered.

Mark hesitated, until, seeing that Barseba was anxious to tackle the work, he said quietly, "I'm going now to have a talk with Patience."

"I don't want to hear anything about she," cried the old woman.

"She is your daughter."

"Her b'ain't now."

"There is Temperance," he said, and Barseba softened at once.

"Her's my daughter," she replied.

"She and Timothy can't find a cottage. When I marry Patience, will you let Temperance come here?"

Barseba had no answer ready. She would not believe Mark really intended to attempt the task of making Patience respectable. She understood duty; by devoting herself to ceaseless work she had attended to hers, but Mark would not be performing his by marrying Patience. Nor could he be even virtuous if he desired to marry a dissolute young woman. Barseba had always liked Mark and had admired him, but if he married Patience she would have to admit that what the neighbours said about him was true: he was an unprincipled fellow working for his own ends.

"I be an old woman," she said. "I'll ask ye not to mak' a vule of me."

"I don't want to offend you, mother," said Mark. "Temperance is without a home, and she would be useful to you here. You can't have her because of Patience. If I take Patience, will you have Temperance?"

"I would like Tempy. I gets cruel lonesome. Why be yew so anxious vor Patty?"

"To keep her straight."

"It be all tu late vor that sort o' game."

"It's never too late."

"When the milk be got sour 'tis tu late to mak' cream," said Barseba. "I ha' done wi' the wench. I wun't say another word about she."

"You will have Temperance?"

"I'll have she fast enough. But I be thinking of yew, Mark," said Barseba sadly. "I be sorry to see yew going to the devil."

"Never mind about me," said Mark. "I am playing my own game."

"What be the gude o' telling volks they'm bad when yew'm bad yourself?"

"We all have bad ideas. I'm as wicked as anyone," he said rather wildly. "Well, good-bye, mother. I'll tell Temperance what you say—when I marry Patience you will take her in. You won't come to the wedding, I suppose? You won't

dance at it, but there will be nothing to drink. I shall marry on water," he shouted, as he went across the court. "You look young enough to dance. You will never get old, mother. 'Eat an apple going to bed, you'll make the doctor beg his bread.' You were always singing that when I worked here. It's better to eat the apples than drink them. I'm going to eat mine, core and all, and I won't spit any out if it's rotten. Good-bye, mother." He waved his hat and shouted from the gate, "Patience and I will go to the devil together."

Barseba hurried back to the house, entered the smoke to poke viciously at the burning books of witchcraft, and as she poked she muttered, "He'm mazed. Burn, yew mucky old bukes, will ye? Patience ha' been and witched he."

Mark went out towards the village, laughing. Let them all believe he was a scoundrel except Job Lithern, who could not hear. There were still a few friends left, and these too must be turned against him; old Wreford and his father and Annie should be taught to hate him, and then he could finish with the knowledge that he had at least done something, had made himself repulsive to every living thing. It would be something to admire, a perfect failure; it was a sort of success, a finished work. His marriage would end everything; Patience and he would be paupers, and she at least would get her reward; and as for him, why the old Stoic turkey had shown the way. "Keep away from the women," the bird had said in the old days, and Mark had neglected the advice and was letting a woman ruin him; and now the bird, being dead, went on speaking, "Follow my example. It does not hurt."

Reaching the busy home of the twin brothers, Mark beheld laziness in the garden, Patience lounging about with her fair hair hanging down her back and her clothes in disorder. She did not finish dressing unless there was an object, some man to meet or a meeting to attend, when it became necessary to make an exhibition of herself. The sickly colour on her face, as if paint had been applied and not quite washed off, the languor of her eyes, the lethargic dragging of each foot, were

enough to repel any man who did not wish to dabble like a fly in poisoned honey.

"Well, deary," she droned—to Patience every man was deary, either comparative or superlative—"what a long time you have been coming to see me!"

From force of habit she put up her mouth, and when Mark kissed her, for him roughly, she exclaimed, "That's the best kiss you've ever given me."

"Who kissed you last?" said Mark in a ghastly mood of mirth.

"You know, deary, I wouldn't let anyone kiss me except you."

He pushed her away, she screamed with satisfaction, ran up and butted him into the hedge, then picked up a handful of dry manure and flung it at him playfully. Mark walked to the cottage door and called for Temperance, and that calm-faced woman came, more clumsy than ever and more stooping. She had not been well for some time; she followed Mark patiently. When they reached Patience, he asked, "Has she been going out with fellows?"

"I reckon 'tis vor she to answer," said the woman, who was not going to speak against her sister, whom she loved and would always love merely because they were sisters.

"Temperance is an old maid," mocked Patience. "She hasn't got any children, and she don't know how to enjoy herself. I'd give anything to see you kiss her, deary."

"Patty be a bit lively as yew knows," murmured Temperance.

"Why shouldn't I go out with a chap sometimes? I've got nothing to do, and you ain't in any hurry to make me respectable," said the girl. "A fellow did kiss me last night, just a little kiss, not the sort that counts."

"Yew ought to know better, my dear," said Temperance feebly; for she knew more.

"Look at Old Methody," laughed Patience. "A girl can do what she likes till the day she's married, and then she settles down. That's right, ain't it, Tempy?"

"Ees, I reckon," said her sister.

Mark knew that was the custom; only the marriage counted, and the engagement was practically not agreed upon until the wedding-day was fixed; so he said, "We had better settle on the day."

"I'm in a fearful hurry," said Patience. "I want to get out of this dirty old hole."

"I have just seen your mother," Mark went on, turning to Temperance. "She will have you and Timothy when Patience is out of the way."

"The old devil," muttered Patience.

"Du' ye be quiet," said Temperance as sternly as she could. "Mother be a dear old soul, and it b'ain't right vor yew to tell agin she."

"I'd laugh if she was struck dead," the girl muttered. "She won't have Timothy for long."

"Be quiet, Patty," said Temperance loudly.

"Be quiet yourself. After two Saturdays of Timothy, mother will turn both of you out."

"My husband be a gude man," cried Temperance, as usual.

"Oh yes, you'll stand up for him until he kills you, or till I kill him," cried Patience fiercely. "I will, by God! I'll stick a knife into his heart if I see him knocking you about again like he was doing——"

"Don't ye believe she. There b'ain't no truth in it," lied Temperance bravely. "Timothy be as gude a man as ever breathed."

"Every blessed Saturday night he comes home a madman. He can get as drunk as he likes, but I won't have him knocking you all over the floor. I don't care whether you're his woman or he's your master. You're my sister, and I'll be damned, and hanged too, before I see you beaten. Ain't that right, Mark?"

"I didn't know Timothy was as bad as that."

"He b'ain't, Mark," cried poor Temperance. "'Tis all Patty's mak' up. He du take his drop, like the others, and

he'm a bit peevish sometimes, but he don't lift his hand to me."

"You silly old liar. Didn't me and you have the best teeth of any maids in the parish when you got married?"

The woman could listen to no more. She flung her apron to her eyes and slouched away, an ungainly shape of shame and wounded pride at having that secret life, which everyone must hide somehow, exposed in the presence of Mark; and as she went Patience laughed disdainfully. "Tempy never could enjoy herself, and now she can't look after herself. Well, deary," said Patience cheerfully, "are we really going to settle down?"

"Come with me," said Mark. He drew her to the end of the garden behind the holly-bushes which grew there, and then he said as calmly as he could, "You know I don't love you, Patience?"

The girl gave a stupid laugh before she answered, "You might say you do."

"And you don't care for me."

"Yes, I do. I shouldn't marry you else."

"You do not. Why can't you speak the truth?"

"I won't be called a liar," said Patience sullenly. "Of course I love you. It's easy enough. Why do you marry me if you haven't got any love for me?"

"You know," said Mark, almost maddened by her stupidity. "You promised to give up the life if I would marry you."

"Well, I have given it up—nearly." The last word she did not speak aloud. "I've been waiting months and wearing all my clothes out."

"Do you want me to keep my promise?"

"You must," she cried. "You wouldn't be such a brute as to deceive me and make me waste all this time."

"You have been deceiving me."

"I haven't done any harm. You know what girls are. We must have a little fun, and you know, deary, you ain't very lively. You don't hardly ever come to see me, and—I must speak

to a fellow sometimes I don't see there's any harm in that."

"If I don't marry you, what will you do?"

A look came into Patience's eyes, which Mark had seen when she was threatening Timothy; but she smiled it off, and said, "I should go back to the place you took me from. What could I do else? If you mean to ruin me you had best say so."

"I am going to keep my promise," he said.

Her look of dull satisfaction returned. "I'll be a good wife. I'll look after you fine, deary. I can't cook, and I can't mind a house, but I can be loving; and if you are nice to me we shall get on first-rate. You won't be unkind, will you, deary? You won't drink——"

"Don't be a hopeless fool!" Mark interrupted angrily.

"Well, the chaps do get drunk when they're married."

"I can say that for you," Mark muttered. "You have kept clear of the drink."

"I did," said Patience proudly. "I never took too much. I dreaded it spoiling my complexion."

"Will Christmas suit you?"

"I can't wait till then. Why, I shall be an old woman. I have waited so long already."

"October, then?"

"Yes, I'll wait till then."

"Will you let me try and make a good woman out of you, Patience?" Mark said earnestly, thinking of those early days, a new hope springing up that he might yet avoid his fate, finish his work, and depart to his colonial home with a wife it would be possible to take. He might shape Patience and make her. It would be a hard labour, but not impossible, since he had made and shaped himself. "Let me try and make you a real woman and a wife, one that I can learn to be fond of, Patty."

"I don't see why you want to give yourself airs. The Starkes are better than the Yeos any day, I reckon," said the girl in her stupid voice.

Mark took a step away from her, realising that the task was hopeless, then returned, and said coldly, "How about the child?"

"What are you talking about now?" she asked in the most surprised and innocent fashion.

"The child—yours, the one you sent to Temperance."

"Why, she's not mine, deary."

"Do speak the truth—for heaven's sake."

"She's not mine," said Patience crossly. "I'll have her, if you like the bother. I love the little pet. If she was mine, why shouldn't I say so?" she added in an aggrieved voice.

"Because you are incapable of speaking the truth," said Mark in his down-right fashion; and, as his temper was rising, he went away from her.

So the date of the wedding was fixed, greatly to Patience's satisfaction, since she now felt certain of being made absolutely respectable and quite a lady; and the same evening after dark —there was no moon and the air was warm—she sat upon the grass with one of her friends, hugging him, kissing him, calling him her own darling sweetheart, world without end, amen and amen; and about those amens she was not likely to talk.

For Mark the next few hours were his great ones. Nothing suggested an opportunity, a crevice in the rock where he might insert his bar, at least not at first, as he went along the road feeling that the day was wasted; but upon reaching the point where he would turn from the village he looked up towards an isolated mass of granite, called the Puddlestone, because a little moat of muddy water generally surrounded it, and upon the stone he saw something, and it told him, not in a warning but in a kindly way, to go no further, for he was called; a duty awaited him, whether good or bad he did not know, but he was being sought for in the village. He turned and went back, not choosing his way, but following the guide which carried him by short-cuts to the church tower, towards the group of cottages beyond; and brought him to a stand at last outside Gerard's door.

"I don't know why I am here," he muttered. "We are friends no longer."

The place was quiet and the road was deserted; still, a voice seemed to come from the walls calling, while the windows, and one in particular, opened their mouths at him saying, "Come in and help." So Mark knocked at the door, but there was no answer.

He opened it, but saw nobody. He looked into the sitting-room, and it was empty, untidy, and the smell of the place was not that of the woods. Some paper covered with scribbling lay across an open Bible; beside was a glass containing dregs, and there was a brown stain upon the paper.

The stairs were before Mark, and he went up until he could see a door half-open, and then he heard a voice, low and mumbling. Mark went on, and a vision of whiteness seemed to burst upon him, also a shape, long and broken, and at one end a thing of excessive whiteness, which moved and muttered, "Mark Yeo!"

"I had a fancy to come and see you, Spiller."

"I have been thinking of you for the last hour. I am fearfully ill."

"I won't ask you what is the matter," said Mark bitterly.

"Not what you think. My head is bursting, and when I get up I am sick. What brought you here?"

"My own fancy."

"You must have felt me longing for you. I am done for unless someone helps."

"You are done for anyhow," said Mark roughly. "I won't help you, Spiller. You have gone over to the wrong master, and I'm not going to do more of his work than I can help. You have been false to me; you have left me to do the fighting——"

"I did what I could. The squire has ruined me."

"Leave him out of the reckoning. I know what you are, strong with strong men and weak with weak. You shape yourself according to your company, and you say it's the way

to get on in the world. If you went to convert a thief, you would become a thief yourself."

Spiller took no heed, but forced himself up, holding out a piece of paper.

"Look at this. And I can't walk across the room."

There was to be a special service that evening in the Parish Church of Crediton for a large benefit society, and the preacher was to be the Reverend G. Spiller, curate of Fursdon.

"Well," said Mark, "do you want me to go to Crediton and tell them you are drunk?"

"I am not. It's my head. I have been through an awful time. It is killing me. You know I have got a reputation as a preacher. I ought to be starting soon. I don't like to send a message. Mr Hosken might make an inquiry, he fusses so much; and he's always trying to find out something bad about me. If he found out——"

"That you were lying here like a sot."

"It was last night. I was so tortured and miserable. Can't you find someone to go for me? Mr Hosken is away playing croquet. Will you take a message for me——"

Again Mark interrupted him. He knew now why he had been brought back to the village. "Do they know you in Crediton?"

"The vicar does, but he is away."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes, he is taking his holiday. I have not met the curates."

Mark looked at his watch. Then he approached the bed and said, "I am not your friend, Spiller, but I'll help you. I will get someone to go for you."

"Who?"

"That is my affair. You may be sure the appointment will be kept. The sermon shall be delivered."

His meaning should have been obvious, but Gerard was so ill, he could not think, and was conscious of nothing except a great relief. "You will say nothing about me?" he implored;

and Mark answered, "I don't want even to think about you. Can you tell a lie?" he asked.

Gerard shivered and did not answer.

"I don't ask you to. Choose your own way," said Mark, and he went out.

What would the clergy and the gentry say when they found him out? Is not this the son of old Will Yeo, and are not the Yeos common folk of Fursdon? Who gave this fellow authority to speak? High priests and elders do not change, for they are the appointed guardians of religion, and the spirit only speaks through them, and theirs is a God who loves a gentleman.

The days were shortening, and it was growing dark when a little farm cart rattled into dreary Crediton and drew up at one of the numerous places of public accommodation. Edith stepped out of the cart. She had seen the notice of the special service and the name of the preacher. The chance was too good to lose. Gerard would not guess she was listening to him, and she could find out which way he was going; she could test him by his speech, apply her standard, and discover how far he was below it.

At the same time two labouring men on their way home passed a clergyman leaning against the wall in a by-way which led from the station to the town, his face towards it, standing there as if he was ill. They hesitated, and the stranger straightened himself and walked on towards the clamour of the bells.

The great church was almost as crowded as its burial ground, chiefly with men. There were only two clergymen, one a curate, the other the preacher, who, it was noticed, kept his head down and wore no University hood. The stranger took no part in the service, and when kneeling kept his face covered. A plain, earnest face it was, disfigured by a scar; as one man remarked to another, the curate of Fursdon looked like a fighter. Most of the time his eyes were closed.

Edith, seated behind a pillar at the side, could not see the

clergy, but she pictured to herself Gerard sitting there, and she sent him a blessing and the mental message, "Be a man, Gerard. Be strong." She had come for the sermon: the service was merely a preliminary to that. The army of men had come to hear their orders. A fighting hymn was sung with the splendid violence of a crowd; the gaslights jumped, flickered, descended; and through the dimness crept a white-clad figure, as if it was frightened and trying to escape.

"I wish I could see him. He looks nice in his surplice," was Edith's comment; and then she gave a little start, for she did not recognise the voice, low and trembling, giving out the text, "Touch me not."

Another moment and every face was upturned with a movement that seemed to make a sound, for a loud voice came through the building, saying—

"I have come here to-night to ask you to disobey Christ."

Then there was silence and a painful pause. Seconds went by, but not another word came. Almost a minute passed, and the faces were still upturned, some smiling nervously, others almost frightened, others fierce, and a few painful to look at. Edith clenched her hands so tightly that she split her glove. This was not Gerard's voice; but it must be he: the occasion had overwhelmed him, he was feeling unequal to it, perhaps his head was bad. A dramatic trick, thought others; but it was not so. The preacher was dumb, he could not find another word, he had neither sermon nor notes before him; he was like a man standing on the cliff gazing over a sea he could not cross; like a captive given his liberty and not knowing how to use it. He made a motion as if he would leave the pulpit, and then he turned, looked out towards the stones, some of which had perhaps once been on Dartmoor covered with moonshine, beaten by the wind and scourged with rain; and he smiled, for the words were written on the stones.

"Give me your attention," he said simply; needless words, for every ear was straining. "I am going to ask you to walk

with me, first through a garden in the early morning, then through a street late at night. We will pass from one extreme to another, we will descend from a height which we cannot realise to a depth which is common. We will try to walk between God and the drunkard."

"Gerard, you are splendid after all," one little soul was singing.

Not an ear missed what followed, as the preacher in a simple way told the story of Easter morning, the story of life, of the man supposed to be a gardener, and the woman who was certainly a sinner, of their meeting, and of the command in the words of his text.

"Have you ever thought what you would do if you were sitting in the garden, watching the bend in the path, and saw the Creator walking towards you? Which way would you go, away from him, or to meet him? If you saw the spirit of evil approaching, which way would you go? And if both spoke and said, 'Touch me not,' whom would you obey?"

There came a flood of words, of earnestness rather than eloquence, the sentences not always grammatical; but faults were not noticed, for the congregation began to be eager, and the eyes looked hungry.

"I implore you to disobey God and obey the devil. When you dare to approach, with life still in you, when you fall down before the Gardener and hold those feet, when you hear the stern and angry command, 'Away with you, touch me not!' do not listen; disregard, disobey, hold on, I pray you, hold on. Ask him to strike you, to kill you there; but hold on—die like that. He will forgive. With my whole soul I believe he wishes you to disobey, and when you do so he will smile. Is he not only trying you, since he knows that men want most that which they are commanded not to touch? Let us go into the street."

At last Edith, by squeezing somewhat rudely, managed to catch one hurried glimpse of the preacher's face.

It was a long sermon, but the flight of time was not noticed.

The preacher came to the lights of the street, the glare of corners in towns, the dull lamps of the country, and there his purpose was revealed, and the words of his text sounded continually like three clear bells.

"Do you see that man creeping along, trying to stand, muttering curses? Touch him not, you say; he is not a fellow-creature, he is hardly a beast, he is nothing at all. Don't you know what he is trying to say and trying to do as he reels towards you? Don't you know that he is in terror, that the something good which was given him once is working unknown to himself, compelling him to appeal to you, to every man in the world, to the heights of heaven? Don't you know he is struggling in his unconscious way to find the city of refuge? He is staggering towards you to hold on to you, and in his poor dumb fashion he is praying, 'Save me, help me; I am running away, but I cannot escape. Wherever I go something follows me, death, and awful things worse than death, and one thing more awful than any—it is myself. Save me for the love of God from this mad and awful self!'

"We continue our walk down this street of the town, with small low houses on each side, and we enter each one and listen to the voices of men and women. We pass through the country village and enter each cottage; and we wonder when we hear the weary folk saying much the same. The village may be a long way from the town, and yet the people are the same, using the same words, not all of them, but too many. When their lips begin to move we see what is coming, and we grow faint and hopeless when we hear again, 'The drink is at the bottom of it.'"

Finally, the preacher took his hearers back to the garden; and it was not morning, but evening, and the sun had set; and it was the end.

"I do not believe the modern thought which maintains life moves in a circle, arising from itself and returning to itself. I hold to a beginning and an end. The day is over, and who walks in the garden now? Who is paying the labourers, who

tends the flowers, who burns the weeds? I seem to see in the garden, in a part we have not walked, because we could not find any entrance, a few: and they are the disobedient; and not very far from the gate a great number, those who had not the strength to fight against themselves; and outside still more —surely these quiet, indifferent men have done no wrong—who are they but those who once had power and would not act?"

"It is the standard," Edith murmured, without knowing she had spoken aloud.

As she passed from the church, a group of men ahead of her were talking; and she drew near to listen.

"They said he could preach, and so he can, I reckon."

"I could hear every word—clear as a bell."

"A little chap, too. He don't look strong. But it seems to me he's a bit of a Unitarian."

"Didn't he pitch it into some of 'em? I should go and hear him again if I had the chance. I like a bit of straight talking once in a way."

"It was a good sermon, right enough. Let's go and have a drink."

CHAPTER XXI

ABOUT PASTORAL SCENES

WHEN that notorious charlatan, Master Kelly, stirred medicine into his crucible and brought forth gold, philosophers were found who believed in him. Had the alchemist been an honest man he would probably have won neither riches nor fame: he would certainly have left no memory, he would have shared the fate of those who called him an impostor, the speakers of truth who, because they made no other sound in the world, were forgotten when they left it. The alchemist was a success; but while he schemed and brought misery into the lives of many, making himself unworthy of remembrance, there were, no doubt, hundreds of poor men going about, not doing much good but trying to, seeking to help others, speaking the truth, making themselves hated, praying men to open their eyes, pointing to the grim notices posted on each side of Damnation Alley, "Here you can get drunk for a penny, dead-drunk for twopence, and have clean straw for nothing"; and the lives of these men are wrapped up in the earth which holds their bodies and has forgotten their names. When the list of great men comes to be considered, it may be found that no small number live in memory by their crimes.

The deeds of good men are like candles blown out with one blast; and he is only good who gives all he can. It is not enough to give a little, he must give himself; like a bird singing in spring-time, offering its whole body to the sun. The good man knows that to plead the old excuse, "I have done nothing," is to plead guilty to a crime. "I have done my

best and accomplished nothing." That he may and must say; and that man can show a better record upon earth than he who has done much; for the world loves a villain and despises the victim. Alexander and Napoleon live for ever, but who thinks of those they slaughtered?

The philosophy of men and deeds may be summed up in one sentence: they whom the world can understand are great, they whom the world cannot understand are rogues until they die. The maid of Domremy was a witch while she lived, Socrates was a corrupter of morals, Christ was a brawler in the temple; and all were murdered. The shedding of blood is the one act that the world does understand, therefore the title Great is given to those who have shed the most. But the good men, the Socrates who sheds light upon human folly, the little father of the birds and flowers, the chaplain of a lazar-island, who gives the title Great to these? They cannot live till they are dead; not until their bones have perished are they loved, and then with the wondering kind of pity of indifference.

As for that sermon, the country was too sleepy to notice it, and the local papers, which devoted many columns to a divorce case, dismissed the far less interesting event with a few obscure lines, mentioning that the sacred edifice was crowded and a stirring address given by the curate of Fursdon. But bubbles were soon bursting in the pool of orthodoxy; the curate, who had been present, felt it his duty to report to the vicar that Mr Spiller had preached a sermon certain to cause offence, and one constituting in his opinion a gross outrage upon local and national character, considering that drunkenness was practically non-existent. The vicar wrote off to Hosken recommending that the young man should be muzzled, and saying, "I cannot give him the use of my church for ventilating his private grievances." The croquet-player was completely prostrated and lost games to an inferior opponent in consequence, which was serious, as it damaged his reputation; so he approached Gerard and asked for an explanation.

The young man was in a hopeless state. He did not know even then what had happened, for Edith refused to say anything, and Mark had not been near him. He could not suggest to himself that Mark might have dared to outrage the church and expose himself to the fury of its canons by assuming the part of preacher. It was certain, however, he would have to bear the blame, as he lacked courage to confess he had failed to keep the appointment owing to an illness which might be inquired into. So the only course was to lie and say, "I did not wish to offend."

"I thought you had quite freed yourself from that unhappy habit of exaggeration," said the rector. "It is not only bad for the congregation, but bad for you also. You have said things in your sermon which have given Mrs Hosken and myself much pain. Listening to you has frequently brought blushes to my cheek. Your sermon on the Crucifixion some time back was absolutely indecent in its realism. You must never shock a congregation, Spiller. They don't like it, and when they are offended they leave us and go to chapel. You should also remember that the sermon has an influence upon the offertory."

"I will restrain myself in the future," Gerard promised, wishing that he could.

Then Vivian came, delightfully smiling, with a sleek little mongrel trotting at his heels.

"Really, I must congratulate you upon your marvellous adaptability," he said. "To lie in bed sick of a headache and at the same time to flutter the clerical dovecots with a heteromorphic sermon is no small feat."

"I thought you would find me out," Gerard muttered.

"My mind seems to be so well organised that nothing escapes it," the squire said. "I had reason to know you were ill that day; being in Credition I made inquiries, learnt that Mr Spiller had an extremely impressive manner, which I was well aware of, was informed also of something which I did not know, namely, that he had a scar on his face——"

Vivian broke off, while Gerard started up and stared in a ghostly fashion.

"Mark Yeo!"

"I am delighted with Mark Yeo," said the smiling squire. "If he had only told me of his plans, I would have driven him over, sat under the pulpit—with the slightest encouragement I would have behaved like the floods in the psalms."

"This is no laughing matter," cried Gerard.

"Indeed it is. The idea of the sheep being driven into green pastures by the druidical Yeo has amused me immensely."

"You don't imagine I sent him?"

"I hope you did."

"He came to me when I was ill. I told him I couldn't go, and he said he would find someone. I was too bad to think, or I might have known he couldn't. I have wondered ever since what did happen. What will they do to him?"

"He is not found out yet. When that happens he will be placed, I suppose, between a synod and a consistory, with all the bishops on the top, and his life will be squeezed out. The church is not going to have eagles in her pulpits. Perhaps he will not be found out. The onus of that sermon is upon you."

"A layman preaching and posing as an ordained clergyman," gasped Gerard. "Has it ever happened before?"

"It has not happened now," said Vivian. "Mark Yeo is as much a parson as you are, perhaps more, for the man who put his hands upon him is the only man that I ever respected."

He made the confession hurriedly, and with some irritation, as if he felt it was weakness; while Gerard stared harder than ever, and said of course the squire was joking.

"I usually joke truthfully," came the answer. "When Yeo departed from amongst us, he went to the wilds of Canada."

"Because he couldn't get ordained here?"

"I object to these clerical interruptions," said Vivian, emphasising the adjective. "Mark Yeo went to a place where men are wanted, and, being an earnest fellow, was accepted by

a bishop who was one of my college friends. He writes to me occasionally, asking for fonts and altars and foundation stones; so I learnt from him what Mark was up to."

"Why doesn't he dress as a clergyman and call himself one?"

"Because he has given an undertaking to pass as a layman here. It has been rather a popular trick among some low-born young fellows to go over there, offer themselves for mission work, and directly they have slipped into orders, to return home, take curacies, marry fat widows, and live comfortably. Yeo was given his training under a promise that he would not play this trick."

"Now I understand him and his five years," Gerard muttered.

"His present offence consists in preaching without a licence and personating you. But I don't think you had better say much. They would probably declare you had put him up to it."

"I shall have to keep away from Crediton, then."

"There are a lot of publicans in that town," laughed Vivian. "If you appeared in their midst, they might erect an altar and offer you up as a sacrifice to Bacchus, whose worship it would be imagined you have profaned. There is no other news," said the squire happily, "except that Mrs Allen has been committed to take her trial at the Assizes. She has of course been released on bail. Miss Edith, I hear, gave her an atrocious character, which was rather unkind, for Mrs Allen is a nice little woman, if she is somewhat bloody-minded. Your sermon by proxy has upset Hosken dreadfully. The poor thing tells me his hands shake so dreadfully he has to receive bisques."

Vivian went off muttering in his usual way, "I am more than ever delighted with Mark Yeo. I must ask him to visit me, and I will get someone to meet him. It should be quite an honour to meet an eloquent man like Mark Yeo. I like that curate of Crediton. He can tell a good story sometimes. I will ask him."

Soon after his return the evening letters were delivered, and one of them was interesting. Vivian read it standing in a passage, holding a lighted candle near the sheet, and his face became a mystery. It was the letter of a simple and broad-minded man, his old friend the bishop, written from a mean house in his lonely diocese, coming like a message from the dead. It was the letter of a man still a child in many ways, who had never quite grown out of the age of innocence, who saw only the evil which passed before him and hardly knew that any other existed, whose mind was necessarily a tragic one, if tragedy shows men as sublime and better than they can be; and he wrote to the friend whom he loved, to the reveller, the comedian, the comus-singer, whose aim it was to exhibit individuals in a ridiculous light and worse than they were.

Some memories must have come to Vivian as he stood in the gloomy passage reading that simple letter by candlelight: memories of youth, when cornfields are always golden and moons are always full, and the paths which run across the meadows are high with flowers; and so on to the shadows of immortal Oxford's spires.

"It is always a pleasure to write to you, dear man. I think every Sunday of my life about those meetings in your rooms after the evening service, of our meditations together and our prayers. How helpful they have been to me I cannot tell you, but I know how your strong and kindly influence shed upon me then has never been removed, and I feel that what I am I owe in no small part to you, to those meetings in your room at Oxford—I can see the yellow lupins beneath the window and the tulip-tree nodding in the dusk—to those walks beside the Cherwell, where 'we took sweet counsel together'; to those afternoons at Godstow, where we tested each other's faith and stood the test. You were the strongest, dear man. There was no wavering about you."

"Yes, I did," said Vivian, looking up suddenly, speaking defiantly, as if someone had contradicted him. There was no smile on his face, and his tone was different. "I had those

meetings, and we read the Bible, then discussed a chapter. I liked those meetings; they amused me. Religion has always amused me. They called me a leader of thought, a sound theologian; they thought I should lead them against the Evolutionists and the Higher Critics. I liked it; I was very pleased. I had a number of disciples in those days, and I am still the same man, if circumstances have altered my life. I am deeply religious in my own way. I should like to go to Canada and tell the dear thing I have not changed."

He shuffled along the passage, grease dropping from the candle upon the letter like penitential tears.

The next day he looked for Mark, riding up the long hill to the old turnpike where the roads divided, one going north into the swampy lowlands and dense copsewoods of mid-Devon, the other leading towards the bare moorland villages. It was a quaint dwelling-place, formerly a cottage for the collector of tolls under the old and fair system that they who used the road should pay for its upkeep—too sensible a system to be maintained—and now it was the home of Old Coles; a little, round, yellow house with one chimney atop, like a mandarin's button, and it stared along the big road, which there ran straight for some distance, like an impassive oriental face, the door for mouth and windows on each side for eyes. Behind it was a patch of garden, well cultivated and lined with young trees, which the old man had planted. He would pull seedlings of ash and sycamore from the hedgerows and bring them home to plant, but they grew slowly on account of the tempestuous winds, for the road was there at its highest point, a thousand feet above the valleys, and the leaves made much ado at night time. It was a well-kept garden, not one to stop and look at, like the twin gardens of the big brothers in Fursdon; for Old Coles could only scratch, his back would not let him dig. He had suffered a good deal in that garden, but the vegetables must be grown, docks and nettles could not be left to flourish; the little maid would want to find everything nice and neat when she came home, and weeds wait for no

man. So he picked up the mattock, which was growing heavier every month, chopped here and scratched there, although it was pain, and when he struck a stone the old body was so jarred it seemed likely to fall to pieces.

"I owes yew nought," said a mumbling voice as the squire first tried the door, then entered, as usual removing his hat.

Old Coles was sitting over the fire in a quaint and huddling manner. It was a warm day to others, but cold to him, so he had kindled a few peats upon the hearthstone. A letter lay upon the floor. The interior was rolling with smoke.

"Well, Mr Wreford, how are you?" called Vivian; and the old man rose very slowly and tried to work his hand towards his pocket.

"I be an old man. I fetches coal, sir," he said. "Who be yew, please, sir?"

"I think you know me. I am Squire Vivian."

"I ask your pardon, sir. Will ye please to pitch while I tries to stir the fire? Coals be sixteen and six the half-ton, sir."

"I am well supplied, thank you," laughed Vivian. "We must have the door open, if you don't mind. I cannot adapt myself to smoke in your amphibious way. I have come to see Mark Yeo. He lives with you, I think."

"He b'ain't agwaine to bide wi' me much longer. The little maid be coming home, sir. I be to get ready to meet she when I ha' rested. I be a very old man, sir. I ha' got a pain here, sir, and a pain there, and a pain down yonder, but I can't get down to tetch mun. Mark be gone out wi' the cart, sir, while I be resting."

"Has he gone far?"

"Abroad in the villages. Us goes a bravish way," said Old Coles, thinking of the hard road which had not done with him yet, and the little villages, all so well known to him, down to the last pump. "He wun't get back till dimsy. The little maid be coming o' Thursday."

"Your daughter?" the squire said.

"Didn't I never tell ye?" said Old Coles eagerly. "I fancied I had told ye the tale, sir. Me and wife never had no children, sir, but one day a girl said to wife, 'I ha' disgraced myself. Will ye tak' the child? I'll pay five shilluns.' So us took the child, and in a year her wrote and said, 'I ha' disgraced myself agin. I can't pay no longer.' That's how I got my little maid, sir, and when wife died her looked after I till they took she away. A little maid, sir, name o' Nellie, and her hair be long."

"She became insane," said Vivian serenely.

"They put she away, sir. 'Twur last year when I tilled the tetties. They ses 'tis only vor a month or two, Mr Wreford, but they ha' kept she vor more than a year."

It was thirty years ago.

"And now she is coming out?"

"'Tis all wrote on the letter. Look ye, sir. Read mun," cried the old man excitedly. "Coming out o' Thursday. I be to go to station and meet she and bring she home. A little maid, sir, about so high, mebbe a bit higher, vor her growed fast. Name o' Nellie, sir, and her be past seventeen."

He tried to gather up the letter, but could not, so he reached for the tongs and tried to pick it up with them, but again could not. The road had worn him out. Vivian stooped down and picked the letter up.

"Mark don't like it, sir. He read the letter, sir, and he said nought. He put his hand across his eyes. Like this way, sir. I don't know why 'tis Mark be cross wi' I vor resting till the little maid come home. I be an old man, sir."

"And an old fool," the squire muttered.

There were two pictures, one hanging as it were upon the wall of the old turnpike, the other in the asylum: the picture which Wreford saw and the reality. The one a young girl, short-skirted, long-haired, delicate in face and pretty in a way, showing yet no signs of the only gift bestowed upon her by her parents—insanity. The other, a coarse, middle-aged woman with a dreadful face, a being almost too unpleasant to be

looked at, whose only instinct for many years had been to do murder. Illusion is a kindness sometimes.

Vivian glanced through the letter. The little maid was to be buried on Thursday.

There was nothing to say. Old Coles had lost the sense of time, and for him it would be always Thursday to-morrow, and he would be always getting ready to travel to the station, and the waiting would not trouble him much, because he would think there were only a few hours left.

Vivian was not concerned. It seemed a sordid thing to him. He wrote a few lines on the back of an envelope which bore a Canadian stamp, charged old Coles to give it to Mark when he returned, and then went his way, grumbling because he smelt of smoke.

Mark broke in during the evening with the question, "Has anyone been here?" and merely glanced at the message left for him by the squire. "Any of the neighbours?" he said; and when the old man replied he had heard nothing except a few carts rumbling past, Mark leaned against the wall with his head down. "They are coming," he said. "I had to run for it." He added in a lower voice, which seemed to carry a curse with it, "A clergyman stood upon the road and said, 'It is your own fault. Why can't you leave the men alone?' See them drown," Mark cried, "and leave them alone. Is a clergyman to stand by and watch his people perishing, and, if one of them does succeed by his own efforts in getting out of the mud, to hurry to him with offers of help? They are brave men. They can throw stones," he muttered. "They threatened to come here and tear the place down, but they never do what they threaten."

Mark had no rest that night, because a great temptation came to him, to escape. His sister Annie had suggested it to him, the idea being in her own mind, as Old Will grew daily more hard to deal with, more like Job Lithern, and he was always urging her to take a man and do her duty. What a relief it would be to play the coward, to disappear in the night,

leave hated Fursdon, and return to his own place, to the future life and the easy death! He would not be neglecting the work, because he was not allowed to work; he would be leaving things undone, simply because they could not be done; on the contrary, he would be going to work, fleeing from wasted endeavours which seemed a sort of idleness, and going to the place where there was—no need for work. He could not escape that; nor could he escape from himself, his sense of what was duty, and that sign which seemed to be outside him. Never had it been so near, never had the meaning been so clear. "Stay here!"—the words seemed to leap at him from every rock, and when he asked, "Why should I stay?" the sign began to shine upon the stones like luminous moss, and then to break up into glow-beetles forming the initials he had seen beside the Teign, on the slope of grass running down towards the water that night he had met the weak man in the wood. "It is hopeless," he said; but he was told that his height more than compensated for his depth, he had reached the standard, he was a hero and a giant, he had conquered the influences of birth, although even these had helped him in a sense, for was not Old Will a mystic? And he had only to continue in that path to win.

Could he get through the fight without a mortal wound? Patience going back to the streets would be surely such a wound. Mark still hoped and prayed that sacrifice would not be required of him, that some way might be shown, that the girl herself might receive a little light into her soul and not require it of him. The sign bewildered him; one time it promised, another time it threatened. "If you stay here, you must meet your fate. If you can conquer your fate, you shall win"; but when he asked the question, "Shall I win?" the answer, proceeding either out of his own unhappy mind or from some agency outside it unexplained, seemed always to say, "You shall not."

The temptation was put behind, and Mark sought for an answer to the question, "Shall I go to Rose Ash?" and he

read the reply, wrongly, perhaps, to be, "Go, for you cannot afford to offend the squire." So he went and delivered himself into the hands of the enemy.

"I am to entertain a few clergymen," observed Vivian to his housekeeper. "Two will take luncheon, and the other, who will be in mufti for various reasons, will come in afterwards. We will have the old port. Clergymen have a tenderness for old port."

Gerard had accepted the invitation; he ceased to decline when the days of lying commenced. So had the other one; and Vivian was tempted to ask the rector too. "Only I could never stand him," he remarked genially. "He has only two subjects, croquet and beer-dividends. Croquet-cups and beer-mugs are beyond me, and Hosken will always be talking, and he talks like a man with a perpetual grievance. Still, I like having Hosken. I always feel like a righteous man when I hear him talking. I feel unselfish when I listen to his troubles. I do not have any myself. I am afraid to ask him, because I am sure he would come."

The day arrived, and with it a swarthy little man of God on a bicycle, black as a winter's day, from the nigritude of his straw hat to the nigrescence of his boots, who approached Vivian with a certain curvature of the spine, and did him honour with affirmatives. He and Gerard were at the opposite ends of colour; the curate of Fursdon was of a fair whiteness, while he of Crediton was blue-black. The squire's smooth humour was aroused by the contrasting colours. "I will move Black into the garden and bring White against him," he chuckled. "Then we shall play the Bishop's Gambit. It will be very amusing."

He led Black among the shrubs and talked botanical Latin until Gerard arrived. Without mentioning names, he introduced the two, observing to each in his mocking way, "Here is a clerical brother for you to play with." Until the gong for luncheon sounded they strolled about the garden, Vivian walking between his guests, giving them little chance to speak.

"I am afraid of you young churchmen," he said. "You are so fond of giving each other the quarrelsome kiss of peace.

If I let you talk you will begin about sermons. They are very dangerous things. As long as you keep your congregations singing and calling themselves miserable sinners they are harmless; but directly you make them sit down and impress upon them they are sinners they become restive. I wonder you clergy don't abolish sermons. You would be so much more respected if you did."

"You have a man here——" began Black, but Vivian nipped him with the serene remark, "This is a bougainvillea, a most heavenly thing. Do you know how it obtained its name? Well, you need not be ashamed of your ignorance, or my pedantry, for there are many dunces in the same class. You all know Julius Cæsar; but nobody has heard of Commerson, and we don't put up statues to botanists. It is fortunate we do not go in for that sort of thing, as, if we did, the artistic people of this land would want to erect a statue to commemorate the genius who originated the idea of bacon and eggs for breakfast. I often think what an extraordinary thing it is that men should go through their lives without knowing the names of common objects which surround them. If you pointed to an article of furniture, and said that is a chair or a table people would think you were insulting them; but if you indicate a very common plant, and remark that is a bladderwort, and it catches and devours flies, they are quite delighted and think you are a wonderful and somewhat an eccentric creature. Still, I don't know the names of many of the birds which do me the compliment of becoming my tenants—and the truth of the matter is, I suppose, we only concern ourselves with what interests us. There are some very simple people in the world. I met a dear young sportsman one day who, knowing that I wasn't interested in his subject of the greatest amount of blood for the least possible expense, and desiring to sink for the moment to my level, mentioned that he had lately come across a certain book with some jolly good things in it, and wanted to know if I had ever heard of it. I discovered that he was alluding to the plays of one Shakespeare."

As they were about to enter the house Vivian drew Gerard back and mentioned, "I seem to have made a blunder. This black gentleman is the curate who listened to the sermon you ought to have preached. That's why I didn't mention your name. I shall refer to you as my dear friend Mr White, and if he asks questions, you may as well mention that you come from Jerusalem, and explain your presence here, also your weak state of health, by saying that you are acting temporarily as the keeper of my conscience."

Gerard drew back. His nerves were getting in a bad way; he was indeed approaching to that condition of mind which was such a useful asset to Mrs Allen; and, as he was always forming resolutions for a complete amendment, and was hoping soon to leave Fursdon with at least a good character, he suggested immediate departure.

"Don't be a coward," said the squire. "We are going to discuss the preaching powers of Mr Spiller. You shall hear what others think about you."

"I have been thinking about that a lot lately, and the more I think the worse it gets," said Gerard earnestly. "I have told Mr Hosken I must find another curacy. I seem to have harmed myself here, and people are beginning to talk. They will say it was a conspiracy between Mark and me, especially as we have been seen about together. I had better go, Mr Vivian."

"You are not going to do anything of the kind; neither shall you leave Fursdon," said the squire amiably. "I should be very sorry if you went. I like you, Spiller, and I don't think the pig-breeder will last much longer. Now come into luncheon, and you mustn't drink too much."

It was hopeless to fight against Vivian, so Gerard went in; they sat down, and the usual small talk followed. The squire was a master of conversation and easily kept Gerard out of difficulties, even when the sermon became discussed and Mr Black denounced the preacher, declared he was a reactionary being, anxious to turn back the tide of civilisation, and expressed a desire to rebuke him personally. Vivian

chuckled, Gerard sat silent, while the third member dilated upon the folly of stirring up ill-feeling, and the wickedness of seeking a cheap reputation for eloquence by means of claptrap.

"Mr White agrees with you," the squire kept on saying. "Nobody is more down upon the fanatics than he. Mr Spiller is his own worst enemy, and, though I like the poor thing myself, I think he is rather a damned fool."

"I have heard a report that he is by no means a sober person himself," continued the angry voice.

"What do you think of that, White? You know something about Spiller. Can't you make some apology for him?" laughed Vivian.

Gerard gave a miserable smile, but could say nothing.

"Well then, I must stand up for my own people," Vivian went on. "Spiller is under the thumb of a young woman who expects too much from him. She likes a man to be strong, as she calls it, to face the world boldly, regardless of consequences and his own interests. It is she, I imagine, who inspired that sermon."

"No," cried Gerard.

"Now what do you know about it?" said the squire.

"I know it cannot be true."

"But I am convinced it is. The young lady has expressed very similar views to me, and this young Spiller, as we know him, White, is very much in love with her. Of course, he is not quite her social equal; but she is in rather unfortunate circumstances, and all she requires is a man who can look straight and talk strongly, and defy the whole world if by so doing he can reduce the output of beer. When she meets him she, no doubt, tells him what to say, and he obeys. I am sure the poor thing hasn't got the intelligence to think it out for himself."

"You are mistaken," Gerard muttered, not daring to say more.

"Her idea is to get this young man out of the country, I

imagine," went on Vivian smoothly. "In Canada, or wherever it is they will go to, no questions can be asked and he can get a fresh start. Dear me," said the squire, laughing violently. "Now I am confusing Spiller with another man."

Gerard was staring at him wildly, his mind full of horrible suspicions, while the third member of the party, whose presence tied his tongue, looked across the table and thought him a queer fellow.

More questions were therefore asked, which Vivian answered in the same mocking way, so skilfully managed as not to suggest any sting of malevolence; and yet the impression conveyed by these answers was not favourable to Gerard, who had to listen and could say nothing in self-defence; for the squire, while pretending to speak of Mark, was abusing Gerard, assuring him Edith was faithless, and telling him candidly he was a poor weak creature with nothing much to live for. It was done beautifully, the conversation was an artistic success; and yet Gerard could not tell even then whether the squire was a friend or an enemy. It might be humour carried to excess, it might be love of joking forced beyond the bounds of decency; but with all that joyous mirth enmity was certainly not suggested. Vivian managed always to convey the idea that he was trying to help Gerard, and to get him out of a disagreeable situation. The words, "I like Spiller—poor thing," were continually humming in his ears.

"If you will go and sit beside the pond I will join you shortly," said the host when luncheon was over. It was time for Mark to arrive, and he was always punctual, and Vivian had a reason for wishing to be absent when that meeting took place. He conducted the two curates half-way to the pond, paid no heed to Gerard when he declared that duty required his presence elsewhere, returned to the house, and told the well-trained man-servant to direct Mark Yeo to the pond.

"He will find me there."

Then he went away along one of the quiet and secret paths muttering, "We must get rid of young Simon Zelotes. This

sort must be kept down. We cannot have the country life turned inside out by visionaries. I like the rabbits, dear little things, but we have to trap them, and I like Mark Yeo and Spiller. I have always liked them; but they must not nibble in the forbidden pastures."

He made his way by various unseen routes, that garden being, like his mind, a maze of byways, to the opposite side of the pond, where a thick bank of rhododendrons grew down to the water, and behind them was a path where he could stand and watch all that went on. The curates were on the seat, not very near to one another, and apparently upon barely civil terms, as Gerard was not in the mood to say much. Around them were flowering shrubs. Anyone approaching would come upon the seat suddenly; for that garden was a cunning place.

"I enjoy pastoral plays," murmured the contented squire. "I like a sense of mystery and expectation. I enjoy the feeling of being among thickets, groves, and arcades. It gives me an old-world pleasure. I am very fond of the garden play, and if the custom of the time permitted I should certainly follow the example of the old nobility and maintain a staff of players to perform medieval legends in fantastic dresses. My garden is made for that sort of thing, for the fairy element, that delightful touch of the supernatural, figures in gossamers, and strange masked faces emerging from the bushes, performing on the lawns, and passing out of sight. Mystic forms are always attractive in a garden, where the sense of distance is great and there are no high walls to spoil the scene. This is quite an innocent form of human pleasure."

High up the hill, above the pond, where the path was cut in zig-zags, Mark appeared, descending with long strides.

"He ought to be dressed in white and carrying a sacrificial knife," said Vivian. Then he looked upon the water and his mind rambled on: "I do not agree with Bacon that ponds mar a garden because they breed flies and unwholesome smells. I consider that a garden without a pond resembles a mind

without the capacity for extracting humour from an amusing situation. Really, I retain my capacity for self-enjoyment remarkably well. Here is Mark Yeo, clerk in holy orders. I am very glad he has come. It is a pity he has that scar on his face, but he will fight with people. I hope he won't throw anyone into the pond and damage my dear water-lilies."

Both curates heard footsteps and supposed them to be caused by their host. Both turned at much the same moment, glad to be relieved of each other's company, and both rose together from the seat. That instant the idea flashed upon Gerard that here was a plot; this game had something more in it than the mere humour of the squire. He looked at Mark with a face of terror; was met with a frown, a movement of impatience, and the question, "Where is Mr Vivian?"

Neither answered, but Black looked at White and then at the newcomer, at those eyes he had good reason to remember, that firm mouth, and above all at the scar which removed all doubt; although the only time he had seen this man, who was now wearing a cheap tweed suit and cap, was when he entered the vestry of Crediton as Mr Spiller, clad as a clergyman, had borrowed a cassock and surplice, and remarked somewhat scornfully that he had nothing to do with testamurs and silken hoods.

"Mr Spiller!" he exclaimed.

Mark took little notice, but turned to the wretched Gerard and said curtly, "Where's the squire? I have no time to waste here."

Without a word Gerard put down his head and bolted, passing them like a rabbit making for its burrow. It was the most ignoble thing he had ever done, the most shameful confession of weakness and of a mind loosened by continual giving way; and, to add to the disgrace, he could not escape quickly, nor yet hide himself, for he had to run up the side of the hill, and the path there was cut in zig-zags, so the watchers by the pond could see him speeding backwards and forwards, always keeping his head down, as if he wanted to hide his face

from the sun; and so he continued until the bushes received him out of their sight.

"Exit hurriedly," murmured the happy squire. "I am delighted with the young men."

A short, sharp dialogue was taking place beside the pond, anger on one side, contempt on the other, mingled with some despair, for Mark knew that Vivian had beaten him, and he felt that the squire had never forgiven that encounter in the past, when Mark had for a few moments broken his will down.

"Do you know that clergyman's name?"

"Mr Spiller," said Mark. "If I don't tell you, Mr Vivian will."

"The curate of Fursdon?"

"Yes."

"The squire called him Mr White."

"It suited his game, I suppose."

"What game?"

"Ask him."

"I would rather ask your name."

"I am Mark Yeo, the son of an honest man."

"You preached in Crediton church?"

"I did."

"You spoke a lie and acted a lie. Do you call yourself an ordained clergyman?"

"I call myself a man who tries to do what he believes to be his duty," said Mark, resenting the tone. "I spoke no lies, but I acted one, and I would act a hundred if by doing so I could open the eyes of my countrymen to their indifference and the fate which nature has in store for them—their downfall for lack of moral and physical strength."

"Speak up, Mark Yeo," murmured the squire from his hidden pathway across the water.

"You seem an educated man, yet you do not appear to realise what an awful crime you have committed. You, a layman, treating the church as if it were a common meeting-house, passing yourself off as an ordained priest, daring to speak with-

out having received the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have insulted the church; you have committed sacrilege, and must pay for it. You will hear more when my vicar returns."

"I can be found when I am wanted. I do not run away. One thing I must say," said Mark, while Vivian, seeing that the play was over, began to wend his way towards them by means of his secret paths, like a spider swinging itself from one corner to another, "Spiller is not to blame. He was ill, could not come himself, so I took his place without his knowledge."

"He must have known afterwards. He has shielded you by his silence."

"Spiller is weak."

"It is a pity you are not like him."

"Well, Mark Yeo! I am delighted to see you. It is very good of you to come," cried a genial voice, and the squire appeared before them, his face covered with smiles, his grim eye-glasses swinging. "I take a very great interest in Mark Yeo."

The young man stepped forward, almost pushing the curate into the water, and faced Vivian, just as he had stood up before him in the old days, when his mind had responded to the unspoken challenge thrown to it; but there was not the same bearing then; the zeal was still there, but not the hope; despair had taken its place. He was doomed, and he knew it; the forces of the enemy were drawing round; the life never very strongly held was departing. He could only stand before the strong man, as a beast before the butcher, waiting for the blow, wondering perhaps why it should be necessary; and at last he said—

"If I could understand you, Squire Vivian, I should have nothing left to learn. If you could understand yourself, you would be the wisest man living. You have held out two hands: one holding money, and the other a rope. If it is any pleasure to you to know that you have helped to strangle the life of a young fellow who, with all his mistakes, has done what he can, and to know that you have taken the part of men

whose instincts are savage ones, and who have not the big advantage of your high birth and education—if this will give you something to smile at when I am gone, it is yours. I know now why you told me to come here to-day. It was that I might meet this gentleman. Well, sir, you and Mr Hosken have won an easy victory. You have me beaten. You may have another, and a harder, fight some day."

Then he turned and walked away; and he too went along the zig-gags, but not like Gerard; for he held his head up.

"Mark Yeo often talks like that," said the smiling squire. "It is marvellous, considering his origin. Here, Mark Yeo, come back," he cried in the querulous tones of a man who had become old suddenly. "I want to hear about your work. I have some money for you."

But Mark went striding on without one look back; and Vivian could only turn to the black and angry curate, whom he thoroughly despised, to remark, "I like Mark Yeo immensely. If he should die I should certainly insist upon placing some memorial upon his grave."

Mark went back to the old turnpike, listened to the ramblings of Old Coles, and waited for the night. Somehow, he wanted the cool and friendly darkness; but before it came:—

A gang of rough and noisy men came up from Fursdon and from the beer-houses thereof, and at their head was George Vid, ancient and respectable, glowing with zeal for any ugly duty. They had picks and crowbars, with which they began to tear down the garden hedge.

Mark went out, but when the men collected stones he retreated, knowing that any argument was useless, that the law of force was uppermost.

"We will speak to the master," said the unctuous Vid. "I shall be glad of a few words with my old friend Mr Wreford, but we cannot tell you our business, Mr Yeo. We are sadly disappointed in you. You have turned against us, Mr Yeo; you have despised your own people."

The stones of the hedge were rolling out, and the good soil

of the garden poured out with them. When an opening was made, Vid trampled across the little garden, and all the men followed, doing as much mischief as they could.

"Ah, Mr Wreford," cried the ringleader, as poor Old Coles came trembling out to try and save a little; for all the vegetables and flowers intended for the little maid when she came home on Thursday were being trodden on. "I am surprised at you, Mr Wreford, for closing this path up. Yow know there is a right of way here. I always walked across from one road to the other when I was a young man. It is very wrong of you to try and close it up. Your poor vegetables, Mr Wreford! But we must do our duty."

He went on, trampling to and fro, beating down a wide track across the poor little garden which the old man had tended so faithfully, with such pain and groans, and the soil which he had made and kept free from weeds, and the vegetables which were the pride of the old fellow's heart.

"There ha' never been a path here, Mr Vid. My dear gentlemen, 'tis my only little bit o' garden."

"I ha' walked this way vor forty years," shouted one of the men, who might have been thirty.

"All the old volks used to come this way avore Old Coles stopped him up," cried another.

"There ain't never been a soul across all my life, and I be a cruel old man," said the trembling creature. "It be malice, neighbours, vor an old man. Mr Vid, my dear, them's my little maid's gilly-flowers. Don't ye get to break they up. I begs and prays yew, Mr Vid."

"They are right in the path, Mr Wreford," said Vid in his rich and righteous tones. "I am afraid they must all come up. This is very painful, my dear old friend, but we must do our duty. I have always done my duty, thank God"; and he tore up the flowers by handfuls.

"My little maid be a-coming home to-morrow. I'd got the garden to look nice vor she," sobbed the old creature, who had very little life left in him. "I bent my old back till he came

near breaking. Aw, my dears, yew ha' tored my little plat to pieces."

"You should not try to close a right of way," said Vid seriously. "You must not oppose us in the performance of our duty, Mr Wreford. Every man in Fursdon can swear there has been a path across this garden from time immemorial."

"Beer-drinking has made the men of Fursdon so many liars and perjurers," Mark muttered, as he watched the wretched scene. Then he went out, and almost carried the old man back to the cottage.

When the wreckers had departed from the scene of their destruction, Mark went to put his things together. It was against him this fury was directed; he was the unwilling cause of the old man's sorrow, and, to save what property remained, he must go. Flight again suggested itself, but he would not listen. If he went to Freezabeer, the anger of the people would be directed against Old Will, and they might shake the crazy little cottage to the ground. There might also be retaliation, for Will's temper was curious, his strength was great, and his mighty hammer would be ready. He would take to the moor, and in bad weather seek the hospitality of Job Lithern.

"I must get away from you, old man," he said, approaching Wreford, who was huddled up in the corner, muttering about the garden, and the ruin of it, and in a plaintive voice imploring the elements of nature to break upon the white head of Vid, and to use him as he had used others. "I ought to have gone before. I have harmed you. I have done good to no man."

"To-morrow be Thursday," muttered Old Coles, looking up with a face of infantile senility. "Her be coming home to-morrow, Mark, my dear. Her wur allus cruel fond o' the gilly-flowers, my little maid, name o' Nellie; and her be past seventeen."

CHAPTER XXII

ABOUT MISJUDGMENTS

BARSEBA STARKE left Love Lane, and walked to Fursdon Town. It seemed a small matter to chronicle, but it was great to her, for she kept no holidays, there was no new moon for her, and she had not covered that mile by the two fields and the road to show herself in the village street—perhaps it would not be safe to mention how many years had gone by since she had taken that simple walk. When she left the farm, all things automatically ceased to work; fire, oven, fowls, and four-footed beasts, brooms and hayforks, cream-pans and pots, all remained idle. She was like an engine-driver, always on duty; and when her hand dropped from the regulator there was no more movement.

Caleb was getting wilder, more fearful of being robbed, and certain that the farmhouse was surrounded by desperate characters after his lambs and honeypots. Somebody had advised Barseba to cut off his long white hair, and she had made the attempt, under the excuse that "master must look vitty"; but directly Caleb felt the cold scissors at his neck, he howled and declared she had been bribed to cut his head off. Barseba had never thought the haircutting would restore his senses, even though the scissors had been placed for a night within the Bible, between two pages of the book of Daniel, which told of fearful things. She knew what was the matter. Caleb was under the spell of those old books, which had all been burnt except the two carried off by George Vid; but these were unfortunately the very ones which contained that

black and potent magic, the very essence of distilled witchcraft, which had crooked her master's mind. There was some connection between books and bellows. Barseba could not explain it, and nobody could have helped her much, but the evil spirit which passed into the bellows when they were placed upon the table had undoubtedly emanated from the books, and when it had done its work it would return to the books, and by burning the books the evil thing would be destroyed; for it never entered into Barseba's mind to suppose that it would have the sense to escape. The prince of darkness was omnipotent; and yet he was a fearful fool.

Barseba reached the dirty little cottage, half fowl-house and half shop, and found Maria sitting in idleness, bemoaning the fact that wishing would not perform housework, and shooing away the fowls, which sometimes showed a desire to use her lap for egg-laying purposes. As usual, there was no money, creditors were barking; so George had gone forth to try, with eloquence added to magnificent virtue, to stupefy weak-minded persons into the settlement of imaginary accounts.

"Me and father be ruined, Mrs Starke," said Maria cheerfully, the poverty of indolence and mismanagement being a virtue there. "Us had to du to-day what us ha' never done avore. Us ha' broke the blessing-box."

"If yew ha' done that yew ha' broke your blessings," answered Barseba.

"I know us have," said Maria somewhat proudly. She felt that nobody else in the place would dare to break open a blessing-box, because it was sacrilege; it was taking back what had been given, very indirectly, like all such halfpence, to the Almighty. "Me and father b'ain't superstitious. Us knows our gude deeds will be remembered," she added, while Barseba said she was glad to hear it, although she feared such trifles might be forgotten.

"Yew ha' heard the tellings, I fancy?" asked Maria. She was an illiterate woman, very unlike her husband; although where George got his fine speech from was one of the wonders.

"Us hears nought to Love Lane, and if there be any tellings I ain't got time to listen. Tellings mak' no butter, Mrs Vid," said Barseba, her hard-working soul offended by the dirt and squalor of that fowl-house.

"Yew ain't heard about the curate?" cried Maria.

"It takes a long time vor tellings to reach Love Lane, and postman don't often come."

"Well, I'll tell ye. He comed home last night, wouldn't et nothing, and in the night he gets up and stands on a chair, and drives a gurt big nail into the beam," said Maria, getting up and acting the part dramatically. "Then he takes a bit o' rope, makes one o' these slip-up-and-down knots, and puts mun round his neck——"

"Yew b'ain't telling me he's been and hanged hisself?" cried Barseba.

"Postman ses so. Dead as a door-nail, he ses. Some of 'em say he wur took down in time; and he had wrote on a paper, 'The drink be to the bottom on't.' They du tell about he drinking like twenty trouts, Mrs Starke."

"If it be true, 'tis a fearful ending vor a young gentleman," said Barseba.

"So 'tis, I reckon; but father ses 'tis no more than he looked vor. He'm cruel artful wi' his eyes, be father. I ain't heard the bell," said Maria gleefully. "I set the door open to listen avore yew come along. I reckon they'll sound the bell vor mun, though the devil ha' got he vor certain."

Barseba was not greatly perturbed by any local tragedy. She had heard of too many in her time, and she had not even set eyes upon Gerard. Her own business remained uppermost, and when Maria had done talking about the fame which would come to Fursdon, and the probability that the influx of commoners for the inquest would mean additional business for George, Barseba spoke about the object of her visit; and being unable to contrive any excuse, she did the next best thing, and told what she believed to be the truth. Those two books which had been removed from Love Lane teemed with

pernicious witchcraft, and she desired Maria to return them, or to cast them upon the fire herself.

"I knows nought about any old bukes," said Maria; but at last she did remember, and managed to discover them in a corner of rubbish trodden on by the fowls. "'Tis a damp old place," she explained. "I keeps they old rags there to soak the watter up."

"I don't want to tetch 'em," said Barseba, shrinking from the terrible black letters. "Du ye lay 'em on the fire, my dear."

"How be I to know if 'em b'ain't worth a shillun or two?" said Maria, holding the dangerous things at arm's length.

"George wouldn't ha' throwed 'em in the corner if 'em would fetch a penny," replied Barseba; and the other admitted there was truth in this. George knew everything; he was upon the parish council; he advised everyone, and led the chairman by the nose. If the books had not been absolutely worthless, George would have used them tenderly.

"If the bukes be vull o' witchery, mebbe they'm useful," suggested Maria, thinking of a few of her friends.

"It be black witchery," cried Barseba in deadly earnest. "They'm vair eating the liver out of master, and if yew keeps 'em he'll die; and where be your rent a-coming from then? Us ha' allus paid on the day, vull money, my dear. If Love Lane b'ain't let, there will be bad times vor yew."

This was a good argument, and Maria was almost convinced.

"They'll et the liver out o' yew as well as master. If yew hadn't kept they in the house yew would never ha' broke the blessing-box."

This was also a good argument, and Maria was convinced. Times had been bad lately, or rather worse than usual, and although she was not superstitious, it seemed fairly certain that the books had brought the evil. But Barseba had the look of a woman with money in her pocket, so Maria said: "Yew wants to buy these bukes, I fancy?"

"They'm only a bit of old trade. Yew wouldn't charge volks vor paper to wrap a bar o' soap in. Yew can gather paper in the road cleaner than they," Barseba reminded her.

"I couldn't let yew ha' them vor nought. It b'ain't business, and George wouldn't like it."

"I'll give ye a shillun if yew throws 'em on the fire," said Barseba; but Maria pointed to the broken blessing-box and explained that the wolf was at the door.

"I'll spare two shilluns vor poor master's sake. I can't give any more. Don't ye be a hard woman, Maria Vid. Yew knows 'em b'ain't worth a farthing."

"Give me another twopence. I wants two shillings and twopence cruel. Twopence more, Mrs Starke, and I'll throw 'em in the fire."

Barseba hesitated, for the extra pence seemed far too much, but she gave way and paid the money, then saw the dreadful things placed on the fire, and she stirred them up to be sure not a spell escaped, little dreaming that she was officiating at a sacrifice, or that she had been conducting the burlesque of a sale which in another place would have made a noise in the world of libraries. Thus the priceless books perished and innocent ignorance received content.

Barseba returned by the high lane which led past the cottage of the Rescorlas, willing to get a glimpse at Temperance. It was only a little further, and now that she was out a few more minutes would not make much difference to the quiescent machinery at home, and she desired to see something of the big world before immuring herself again. In her course she received more tellings, for all the women of the place were talking about the curate, and Barseba was feminine enough to take some interest. She believed what she was told, or rather accepted it without asking if she believed it or not.

"Hanged hisself, Mrs Starke! Whoever told ye such a tale? 'Tis a wonder to me how volks can tell such lies, so 'tis. He shot hisself, my dear, through the head, and the bullet went right through and broke a picture on the wall. I heard the

shot in the middle o' the night, and so did my man. Us fancied it wur some old rock a-splitting."

Thus spake a gossip, and Barseba accepted the revised version, made no marginal notes, but walked on until she reached the pink cottage. It was quiet and pleasant there; the door stood open, and full in the sunshine sat the brothers, turning old boots into new. They seemed happy, and while one whistled the other sang. Tom and Ted sprawled upon the warm concrete considering the philosophy of butterflies.

Barseba would have been a misanthrope if she had believed the twin utterance, "Us be glad to see yew," meant anything but the truth. A chair was brought forward, the visitor was forced into it, and the brothers mentioned that when she departed it was highly probable that a basket of flowers and vegetables would accompany her.

"I wanted to come and have a look at the old place. I ain't been along here vor years," said she. "But I couldn't ha' come if I'd seed Patty. Where be she and Tempy to?"

"Gone," said Oli; while Eli smiled and said cheerily, "Us ain't got no woman."

"Where be 'em to?"

"Yew knows Tettipath?" said Oli.

"Why, I ain't never been there, but I knows where it be."

"They ha' gone there. He knows where it be," continued Oli, jerking his head towards Eli. "I put him on his back one day in the garlic what grows strong down there."

"My little brother allus fancies what I ha' done to he, he ha' done to me," was Eli's comment.

"I did hear old Wannell had been took. Be he gone to the house?" asked Barseba.

"Gone to heaven," said Oli. "They wur cruel poor, had nought but vegetables; so the old man wur starved, I reckon."

"What be the cottage like?"

"They ses he be dry in places," said Eli.

"There be walls and a roof," added Oli, "but I wouldn't

ask to bide there in black weather. I'd as soon stand under the trees."

"How did Patty behave while her wur with yew?"

"I wun't say nought about she," said Eli.

"How did Timothy behave?"

"I wun't say nought about he," said Oli; and Barseba asked no more questions, having learnt enough.

"Yew ha' been hearing a lot of tales about the curate, I reckon?" Oli went on, and Barseba admitted that it was so.

"Postman said in the morning, Mr Spiller had been and done away wi' hisself, so my young brother slipped down along to pick up the true tale. I never did know a postman to tell the truth," said Oli. "The true tale be that Mr Spiller comed home yesterday sort o' mazed, and in the night he got out on't. Left a paper to say he'd gone and wouldn't likely ever be back, and he'd write later on. I reckon there be a woman to the bottom on't."

"They ses he drank," said Barseba.

"One o' the two," said Eli. "It be either drink or a woman when a young gentleman runs away. 'Tis lucky vor we that us ain't got no drink and us ain't got no woman."

Even the brothers had not quite got hold of the story, so difficult is it in a country place to prevent a simple fact from being rolled into a ball of lies. Gerard had certainly gone, but he had not disappeared mysteriously. First he wrote to Edith, telling her he could stay no longer in Fursdon, and begging her not to believe the wild stories which were sure to be published concerning him. Then he wrote to the rector, saying that his mother was ill and he must be with her; and then he departed to his own home.

When she received that letter, Edith knew something had happened. No excited young man can avoid suggesting that very thing which he is most anxious to hide, simply because his mind is full of it, and the truth seems to leak into the ink; and the next day another letter came, incoherent, blotted, and wild. Gerard was at home, had seen his parents, been received by

them with honour, and their kind words and attentions had broken his heart. It was not a confession, not the letter of a penitent sinner, but the outpouring of a diseased mind. It was all, "I am sinned against, not sinning. Mr Vivian is to blame, and Mark Yeo is a cad. Both the squire and Mark pretended to be my friend, and both have done all they can to injure me." It was with Mark that Gerard was furious; he it was whom he assailed most bitterly with disjointed quotations such as, "It was even thou, my companion," for his mood was wild, and what the squire had suggested made him squirm. Perhaps it was Mark who had carried stories about him to Edith, and had instilled into her that lust for sobriety which had made her lay a severe covenant upon him. Gerard was entering the stage which comes next to lying, suspicion of his fellow-creatures and loss of moral sense.

Edith's answer came like snow, calm and cold. "Your first letter was foolish, your second was mad, and I will not notice either. I almost despair of you. If you are going to take my burden upon you, and, though you may find it heavy enough now it shall be very light, I promise, you must come back and take up your duties again in Fursdon. You must come at once. This may sound hard, but I would make it harder if I could, for the sake of your future and mine. I am a poor girl, not worth winning really, but if a man loves me he shall find me hard to win; he must come to me across stony ground; he shall prove himself, not worthy of me, that would need little, but equal to the standard of manhood which my girlhood has appointed. Strength before everything, Gerard. My man must keep his light burning in the highest wind, in the darkest night, and he shall not stumble unless I stumble too. Answer truly, am I worth it, are you worth it? Sometimes—but did you not stand before me in Teign woods and deny? If you had not I should have left you, very sadly. If you had lied I think your tongue would have turned as black as a dead leaf. Lying is always loathsome; and between lovers—no word, Gerard, no word. Those vile postcards are in my brain; they

keep on coming accusing you of the one sin. This morning came a poisonous thing, 'The rector found your young man drunk and sacked him. Don't you know that?' I ought not to notice them, when I think what they say about me. Well, I don't in a way, but when a trumpet is blown into your ear you can't keep the sound out. It hurts and stuns."

Edith was not made of asking stuff, so the command followed to return and face things boldly, "like Mark Yeo," which was all the notice she took of Gerard's attack upon his former friend. Then came some light chatter. Edith was still lodging at the small farmhouse, where she was not unhappy, until the trial was over, which she wrote, "is likely to be a farce as Mrs Allen has secured a number of big guns to boom for her. Then I go to a country house near Umberleigh, where the roses come from: a place, I think, made by Mother Nature when she was in a mood for honeymoons, as I hardly know what, but I think half nurse, about ten per cent. as governess, and the rest as companion. I shall know the divisions exactly when I get there. The people seemed nice; the wife rather too many colours on at the same time, the husband quite indifferent to aspirates, but you can almost always trust a man who deliberately drops his *h*'s. Two dear little girls just getting out of dolly stage into fairy stage, and one of them assured me she was known in the domestic world as Oodlins. I have no idea what her real name is. But such a dear atomy! 'Will you love me?' she said; and, of course, I promised. 'Q,' said she, 'will you love me more than usual?' I said I would do my very best. 'Q,' she said again; and when I asked what the mysterious letter might mean she answered quite severely, 'I think you are very ignorant. It is saving time for 'Thank you.'"

That letter was at least a temporary restorative. It brought some sense back to Gerard and enabled him to take a draught from the well of courage. He went back to Fursdon. It was a mistake. Edith, acting for the best, had given a burden which he could not carry. Gerard was simply bad, because he

was weak; his mind went down before others; he had to try and please both Vivian and Edith, which was impossible. He would have rejected the one, but could not; it was not lawful for him to do so; and at the bottom of all was the twofold evil, the natural and the hereditary disposition to do wrong. He required perpetual guidance, a strong mind acting for good always with him. Then he might have done well, might have obtained a complete mastery over himself, and have grown in the right direction. Had Edith married him before the fall she would have saved him; but she would not do so, he must save himself—human lives hang upon such hairs—and when he had won his battle she would stand at his side and win the rest for him. It was a good reward; and yet the men are many who make their own misery and look to others to make their happiness for them; such as Gerard, who thought Edith hard upon him for not joining her life with his until he was worth it; such as Joseph Boone, who had sold his mother's goods for liquor and yet expected her to be bright and cheerful for his sake and to have a good meal awaiting whenever it might please him to come home.

Destiny seemed kind to Gerard, for when he startled the villagers by showing his face among them, Rose Ash was closed, and he learnt that the squire had departed on one of his lonely trips. Nor had Vivian given the rector any reason to suppose that Gerard's excuse for his abrupt departure was untrue. Guns were, however, firing in the distance, and the sound of them passed over the croquet-ground, spoiling many a pretty scheme and two-ball break. Hosken was compelled to open the book of Gerard's evil deeds, though he hated any kind of action.

"The gravamen of the charge against you is this," he began, when he had got the sinner into his study, and was seated at a large piece of furniture, which represented what was left to him of spiritual power and was adorned with a quaint mixture of sacred pictures, a black bottle, wooden cross, wine-glasses, annual reports of breweries, and scoring cards. "There was a conspiracy between you and this village reprobate, Mark Yeo."

"There was no such thing," said Gerard firmly; and Hosken was ready to believe it without the explanation which followed, partly because it was the easiest thing to do, chiefly because it was impossible to suppose that Gerard would wish to be personated by a "common working chap."

"Your illness at the time remains a suspicious feature. You seem to have an unusual amount of bad health, Spiller," the rector resumed. "Being myself more or less of an invalid, I was forced to obtain the services of a curate, finding myself quite unequal to the strain of two and sometimes three services a week. When the captain sinks exhausted in the fight, the lieutenant should always be ready to take his place. If I cannot rely upon you, Spiller, the strain upon me will continue. The doctor warns me to be careful. Sometimes when I stoop upon the lawn, all becomes dark, there is a rushing sound in my ears, I appear about to lose consciousness. I would not let my wife know for anything," he said earnestly.

Less eating and drinking and a little work would have got rid of all that indisposition. Hosken was not a conscious humbug; a local doctor had made a fool of him; his own inclination turned towards idling and rich food; he occupied the position of a man of God, and was nothing better than the handle of a croquet-mallet.

"The work is nothing," said Gerard. "It would be better for me if there was more," he added.

"This illness," went on Hosken, disregarding the confession for personal reasons. "We must have a few words about it. You must be careful, Spiller. Do you understand me? You must be very careful."

A good many questions came to Gerard's tongue; but he suppressed them all, and merely looked the one which he was most anxious to express.

"Vivian tells me you suffer from depression and neuralgia. There is no doubt, Spiller, from what I have been able to gather, that you do occasionally, in your effort to conquer the pain by legitimate means, in your praiseworthy anxiety to fit yourself

for work and your desire to spare me, you do sometimes, Spiller, measure the remedy with an uncertain hand. You understand me, I am sure. I think you had better get the doctor to prescribe. Just how much, Spiller. It is that little more than medical science recommends, that small amount extra which a young man who has not received a medical training may be expected to add, hoping to hasten the cure—it is those few drops which do the mischief. We all experience some difficulty in regulating the precise amount. I speak to you in confidence, Spiller, as an elderly man suffering from a complication of nervous diseases addressing a young man with a tendency towards the same complaints, and I am glad to offer you the fruit of my experience. I never touch spirits, except in those dark moments when unconsciousness threatens me. They heat the body unduly, and, as you perceive, I have some flesh. I drink one bottle of port a day, neither more nor less. I am particular not to take less, and more, I find, tends towards a certain genial abandon which our ancestors thought it no sin to encourage, but which modern taste rightly deplores. And, Spiller, if at any time you should make a little mistake, for goodness' sake don't let the people know anything about it."

Hosken made an end of preaching while Gerard opened his eyes in amazement, and wondered again why Edith was so strict. The rector, who was called a hard man, found himself able to regard any little lapse from sobriety with a thorough Christian charity; and Gerard had been in terror lest Hosken should find out that he had on certain occasions—and somewhat frequently since that day of the great lie—crossed the line. For the first time he had a friendly feeling towards his rector.

"I hope you are not offended with me," he said.

"Not at all, Spiller," came the answer. "In many respects I am satisfied. You do the work well, and you have improved out of all knowledge since you came here. During the first months I must confess I looked upon your future with grave

misgivings, especially when you preached that terrible sermon about Good Friday, and I made up my mind it would be necessary to ask you to take another curacy. Then you changed, you fell into the rut, you wore off the follies of youth, you learnt the art of controlling yourself—may I hope my character was an example to you?—and now I think you will be a success. We clergy have to put a great restraint upon ourselves, Spiller. Moderation is everything, and the possession of it is sure to lead in time to positions of considerable emolument."

"What will be done to Mark Yeo?" asked Gerard, beginning to feel happy and at his ease.

Hosken groaned, shook his red face, and his double chin wagged ponderously.

"He is an unprincipled rascal. An unmitigated rogue. Every man's hand is against him," he said. "He has now taken to the moor as an Ishmael. He has interfered with everybody, with me and you; he has insulted Mr Vivian and outrageously attacked the Church. Nothing has been sacred to him. The people threaten his life, and who can blame them? There was a time, Spiller, when he appeared to have some influence over you."

"Yes, I believed in him once," said Gerard. "But I have done with him now."

"He has treated you more than abominably. I warned you, Spiller. I told you what would happen if you encouraged his advances. You would not listen, and now you have been punished."

"I hope they won't take action. It would mean dragging me into it."

"I am doing all I can to hush the matter up, and Vivian, too, has been most kind. But I fancy things will have to take their course, for that sermon was an outrage upon the whole Church; it was blasphemy, sacrilege. It is all so painful, I hardly dare think of it," said Hosken. "Events will move slowly, lawyers have to be consulted, the opinion of counsel taken. It is inevitable, I fear, for the sake of the Church's dignity that some

action must be taken, but publicity means a raking together of much scandal. We shall all suffer, because it has pleased God to curse us with a scoundrel."

"Mr Vivian tells me he is ordained," said Gerard in a low voice.

"I know, but I cannot find his name in the Clergy List. How terrible it is to reflect that such a man may possibly be able to claim brotherhood with us! If it is true, and I have certainly heard that colonial bishops are most lax and will accept almost any man, the statement can only be proved by writing to the Arctic Ocean, or wherever it is the cunning rascal played his game. A long interval must pass before an answer can be received."

"He would have his patent of ordination with him," Gerard suggested.

"It might be a forgery. These rogues think of everything. Personally, and altogether apart from our sacred office, I should be glad if he were in orders. It mitigates the crime enormously, and it might, I think, induce the authorities to stay their hands. Yeo will be punished, I am sure, by a higher power which," said Hosken, with a reverent inclination towards either the black bottle or the wooden cross—which was uncertain, as they were side by side—"is not liable to human error."

"He has brought harm into my life ever since the day we met," Gerard muttered, forgetting his own wavering and backsliding, or, if remembering them at all, making Mark accountable for them.

"I am not sorry for your sake. It is good for a man to be shown, while he is still young, the criminal folly of going into bad company. The sinner receives punishment, the victim wins experience," said the wise rector. "To-morrow," he went on, "I have a very painful duty to perform. Mrs Allen has to undergo her trial, and I am to appear as a witness on her behalf. Poor, nervous, timid, little woman. An excellent creature, her vicar's right hand, the Lady Bountiful of her parish, a Dorcas in time of need, and a most admirable croquet-player. The law is very cruel sometimes and very

unjust. Mark Yeo terrifies the whole neighbourhood, while poor Mrs Allen is sent for trial as a common thief."

The law was, however, not cruel upon this occasion. A merciful judge presided, and the prisoner was defended by as able a counsel as money could procure. After a servant girl had been sentenced to imprisonment for embezzling money, which she maintained with considerable impudence was to help her widowed mother to procure a pony and cart, Mrs Allen was called upon to surrender, and the complexion of the court changed. People of importance became suddenly plentiful, and the prosecution was soon floundering, as witness after witness testified to the almost saintly qualities of prisoner's character and to the undoubted fact that she was a terrible sufferer from neurasthenia, which rendered her frequently an irresponsible being. Clergy followed doctors, and landed proprietors followed clergy, all telling the same tale of a noble life impaired by the visitation of God. Even the habit of drug-taking became a virtue when it was shown how it was nothing but an attempt on the part of the accused to strengthen her nerves and furnish her body with the means to fight the battle of life. On the other side were a few shop-assistants and Edith. Counsel for the defence had little trouble in showing that Miss Gribbin, together with Mrs Allen's late cook, were both prejudiced persons. The case seemed to collapse. The judge in a kind manner observed that people must not say there was one law for the rich and another for the poor—at which the high-feed counsel smiled—for in that court all were equal. This, he remarked, was a case not altogether uncommon, where a lady of unquestioned high moral integrity, he might even say of unusually high qualities, was accused of deliberately robbing tradesmen of articles she did not require, and could perfectly well afford to pay for if she had wanted. It was for the jury to say if they could discover any criminal instinct in the action of a woman grievously troubled with a distressing disease which made her at certain moments an irresponsible person. After hearing the evidence of the

medical men, he did not think the jury would have any difficulty in arriving at their verdict. He understood that the shopkeepers had received full compensation, and he ventured to think that this was one of those cases which might with a little arrangement have been settled out of court.

The jurymen, however, were inclined to be obtuse and pig-headed, or perhaps they knew a little about human nature. It was also possible that the quiet face of Edith had impressed them at least as much as all the weight of evidence upon the opposite side. Some of them were perhaps tradesmen too, and found matter here with which they were better acquainted than all the judges. They returned a verdict of guilty, and could discover no extenuating circumstances. The judge addressed the prisoner, his tone seeming to apologise for the jury's stupidity, expressed sympathy for her in the terrible position in which she found herself, and said that justice would be amply met by the acceptance of two sureties for her good behaviour. Thus a woman who was in all respects a dangerous criminal left the court with a large crowd of friends; while Edith slipped away quietly by herself.

And yet not so friendless as she supposed. There lived a man who loved her, not with the stupid passion of Gerard, wanting much and giving little; not a man with milk and water in his veins; only Mark Yeo, the outcast, and he was to show her soon.

They were unlike in the way of the world, yet Nature had turned them out together; some time their infant souls had played together in the celestial nursery, and the same brand was upon each. Together in the world, with convention off and systems left behind, with the reserve and want of mutual understanding which raise a perpetual barrier between men and women thrown aside, with liberty of thought and action restored and the spiritual state brought back again, these two, Edith and Mark, would have found the perfect life, like two tempestuous raindrops glancing from the rock and meeting as one unit in the river. And he knew it. She did not.

Since that evening when Edith had sat behind the pillar in

the church and felt the fire upon her cheek, Mark was often in her thoughts. He was the man; and yet there was Old Will with his savage little ways, the association of the rocks and Job Lithern; and there was in him that lack of polish in small things which sensitiveness shrinks from. Mark also was plain in face; he was not like soft, white Gerard, with the fluffy fair head and the piteous way of pleading. Mark was the rock with the lichen on it; Gerard was the fern growing in its crevice. Still there was the standard: that was everything; it was the part greater than the whole. So Edith made inquiries, and soon learnt that this giant had also feet of clay; he was the victim of a coarse and common passion, and was to marry a girl of the worst class, one with no redeeming feature, the lowest form of little wench conceived. Was it to save the girl from a worse fate? No, for they had gone about as children. Mark had always wanted to marry her, and she had refused until, tired of the life, she had consented to take him. Then it was that the figure of Mark toppled over and was broken, and his fragments were swept clear out of heaven.

They met, however, not by coincidence, for Mark knew how she walked of an afternoon beside the Teign where it passed from youth into maturity; and he had waited there often, just to see her, nothing more, to enjoy at least the pain of looking at her for the last time. The sign was with him still, and at last it said, "To-morrow you shall see her"; and it was so. And the sign went away also upon the banks of the Teign, leaving him alone, and it guided him no more.

Three days of torrential rain had fallen, and this, the fourth, was clear, but not calm, for all the moor was thundering, and brooks of no importance had become rivers shouting for a name. Old Will, leaning upon his hammer, listened and recognised old voices. While some distance from the Teign Mark could hear its thunder, and when he came out upon it he saw a rushing, mighty torrent, hiding all the rocks with billows of tawny yellow, and the smaller stones were grinding underneath.

Even the river was against him, for Edith was upon the other side. There was no bridge, no means of crossing. She was distant from him no more than the breadth of a room, yet no voice could get across; even the bellowing of Job Lithern could not have carried across the flood. There was magnificence in that roaring; it was the voice of a God striking humanity dumb, breaking the willows and making the earth shake. The moorland seemed to rock and reel.

Mark rested his hand upon a rock, feeling it vibrate and pant with life and strength enormous, and the touch made him strong; that, and the sight of Edith, slight and pale, her hair wind-blown and the shadows beneath her eyes like gentle violets, watching him sadly and murmuring to herself, "How are the mighty fallen!" She made a sign to him, merely of recognition, possibly of farewell, and would have passed on, as it was idle to stand where speech was impossible; but as she made that movement, the motion of everlasting departure, Mark dashed into the river.

Like a twig it bore him down but outward, then flung him to a pool and whirled him round, then out and down again, from boulder to boulder, like a ball among skittles; but there was always progress across as well as down. Already he was far below the starting point; while Edith was hurrying along the bank, unable to keep up, and expecting nothing but a dead white body at the end.

There came a bend, and here she lost sight of that desperate head and those struggling hands, like forked leaves torn about by the wind, and her courage gave out. He was stunned and drowned. No man could live in that thundering mountain torrent among the rocks, and Edith had a terror of the dead. She sat down, stared at the dizzy tons of water hurled along, and muttered faintly, "He has done it for me, to show me, to tell me—what he must not say."

She went on staring, wondering, dreaming; and then, "There are two Mark Yeos, and one of them has a devil. There is Mark Yeo of the standard, the preacher. There is

Mark Yeo, the villager, the man of passion. Which of them loves me?"

There was another pause.

"Gerard is weak, but it is ordinary weakness. Mark Yeo the second is below everything."

Out of the bushes, out of the willows and alders, and the brambles among them and the bracken between, walked a figure like a drowned sailor's wraith, silently, because no noise was possible, and it came up to Edith and stood before her, to say with a perfect simplicity which had something good in it, "I have come to bid you good-bye."

"Are you alive or are you dead?" she cried, really frightened, because the face looked dead.

"I am alive," said Mark, in the same simple manner. "The water was not cold."

"Not cold!" she exclaimed. "But look at it. Surely nobody could get across."

"So much seems impossible until you try. I came here to see you, forgetting that the river was in flood. I could not make you hear, so I had to cross."

"You are badly hurt."

"I feel sleepy," he said, with a queer movement.

"Why did you want to see me?"

"To say good-bye," said the voice, almost impatiently. "You have done so much for me. Helped me. Nobody else has done that. I want to thank you very much, and then I will go away."

"I have not done anything for you. I wish I could have helped you. Where are you living?"

"Where they will let me. Sometimes I go to Freezabeer and sometimes to Lithern's cot. The weather is not bad."

"You have hurt your head," Edith exclaimed; and her eyes were burning.

"I am sleepy. That is all. Good-bye, Miss Gribbin. God will bless you, I think. My hand is wet"; so it was, with water and with blood.

Edith was crying. She was not a girl for tears, but there

was something in this simplicity and sorrow which wore her down. This man, fighting against everyone, his fellow-men, his fate, the very elements, the dizziness of his brain, his pain, his love, could he be base, could he want the lowest earthly things? Questions surged upon her like the torrent, questions about Patience, but they passed unasked; she could not bring herself to utter them, he was in no fit state to answer. It seemed as if his mind was going. With his foolish hand held out and his tottering body supported by a rock, he was saying, like a child repeating his lesson, "Good-bye, Miss Gribbin. Thank you very much."

"Where are you going? You must be seen to," she said, fighting down her sobs.

"Did you say you had forgiven me? Thank you very much."

"No. What have I to forgive?"

"It was presumption and great folly. It is a great force. That water was nothing."

"Where can you go?

"I can climb up to Drewsteignton. I know people there—kind ones. It was down there I met Spiller. I hope you will be happy. Good-bye, Miss Gribbin."

There was time, Edith. The Gods were waiting, no excuse would serve. It was the great moment, when the thread was lying between the blades of the scissors, when a grim hand was awaiting to avert the torch, and beside the column stood a Titan with his hammer up. There was time while the lonely figure turned, dripping with water and with blood. One word would bring the giant, another would reject the pigmy; the old romance would follow. He could explain about the wench, and he would; and there would be the story of a sacrifice. Life is so much, happiness not less; and both were there.

"Good-bye, Miss Gribbin. Thank you very much."

"Good-bye, Mr Yeo."

"God bless you, Miss Gribbin."

No answer.

It was too late, Edith.

CHAPTER XXIII

ABOUT THE SOLITARY

MARK was not seen. A notice upon the door of Church Beer, announcing that he would hold a service upon Sunday afternoon and preach from the text, "I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink," loosened, flapped in the wind, and few took any notice of it except some lewd fellows who scrawled matter from their own minds beside the words. Eli and Oli came, with others who liked to hear a little brave talk; but the conscript army of Mighty Men, which had never been anything to boast of, was then of no account at all. Young men soon wearied of what brought no profit and much ridicule, and were ashamed of their leader who could not protect himself. They had their own reputations to think of; like those of some savage race, they had to make themselves worthy members of the community, that they might be included among the braves; they had the local fetish to worship, and it seemed their duty to cast their bodies beneath the wheels of the car which carried the idols of lust and drunkenness, driven by insanity and guided by epilepsy. And as for the old folk, they were afraid of Mark, because he would not be satisfied with mere talking. He wanted to change customs, and a new thing to them was a great evil. The door of Church Beer remained shut, the brotherhood disbanded itself, women passed to and fro with cans to procure that which was necessary for the Sunday afternoon, and there was rejoicing in Fursdon over the man who was conquered; and the car rumbled by, as usual, with its hideous painted idols, and those strange, merry things, the

bells of the church, so full of energy and life themselves, those bells which rang for everything, for a brave man's death and a drunkard's wedding, those lively bells rang out to advertise religion. "The voice of the people," so they pealed, "the voice of the people is religion."

Old Judy Boone looked out from her cottage door and wondered if there had ever been a time when she, too, had passed along that road in a pretty hat and a nice white dress. Memory assured her there was once a young Judy Boone who could dance and laugh amazingly; and along the road above these memories were dotted. Against that stone she had leaned in a nice white dress while young Joseph Boone, who since then had passed into old Joseph Boone, and then had gone away altogether, kissed her. She had dabbled in witchcraft even then, although it was the best and whitest kind of magic in those days. She had cast the blue-eyed spell, and somehow it had worked better than any she had practised since. She could not see far either with the good or evil eye now, and she could hardly make out the shape of the down opposite where she had been courted once. For her marriage had meant a kind of bankruptcy under the system which soon swallowed up the wedding-gifts, her stock of clothing, and any secret thoughts of piety. Judy Boone was not a cynic, nor was there philosophy in her, or she might have muttered as the overdressed maidens passed along the road, "Yew don't look this way, my dears. Yew don't seem to mind I wur as pretty as any of yew wance. Yew don't fancy yew will ever be like me, an old bundle o' rags, but yew will be, my dears."

"I ain't been well-dressed vor nigh upon fifty years," was what she did mutter, smiling at the sad pleasure of receiving a new idea. Witch she might be; but she could mutter no spell to bring a new dress, and no incantation that she knew of could restock the home with furniture. The village landlords knew the potent spell: they could wave a wand and summon spirits which would empty a house in no time and transfer the wages from men's pockets to their tills; and even the rector

had some acquaintance with the black art, for by the magic of the fairy dividend that furniture which left the cottage found its way into his home; nor did he complain that he had too much.

The cottage was beneath the road where it made its plunge beneath Dry Arch, and just off it and behind were heaps of blue-black waste, the deads or exhausted mineral earths which had accumulated from the mine. Beside the door were generally two objects, a broom upon one side, a pail upon the other, both old and quaint, the broom being nothing but a wisp of heather tied round a stick, and the pail long ago had lost its original handle, so a piece of rope was substituted. There was a cat also, longer than most, and very lean. These had the appearance of belonging to a witch, for they exhibited the signs of poverty, and witches are necessarily poor. The witchcraft which makes for wealth is work. At midnight Judy Boone picked up the pail, mounted the broomstick, travelled to a far country, and brought back large toads, which exploded in the fire like gunpowder, and all sorts of other horrible things which were useful from a professional point of view. It was necessary for her to get back before the dawn; and, if a cock should happen to crow while she was passing through the air, down the poor old woman came, and the contents of the pail were scattered. Judy Boone had heard so much of her wonderful expeditions that she had almost come to believe in them herself.

A rattlebrook passed beneath the back windows, leaking into the living-room, and over the moss which had once been thatch hung a large wild-cherry tree. This was one of the joys of the old dame's heart, her son was the other; and both were sorrows. The cherry-tree, because it kept on reminding her of that other life when she had tripped along the road in fine apparel; the tree was always young in spring and dressed in white when the blossoms came, while her life showed no awakening, and her white clothes were things remote. The son, because he had left no stage of drunkenness neglected;

and yet he was the only one: he was the boy, and he could be so good when he liked, only he did not like. There was no better man than Joseph Boone in the parish, except for the one thing which unhappily included everything. He was of a kindly nature, he had been endowed with honesty and affection, but without the power to use them; he never quarrelled, rarely swore, he was respectful, would gladly help another, lend money, carry a burden, give his company; he would do anything except keep sober. Drunkenness had become with him one of the fine arts, he possessed what has been described as skill in inebriation, he had not known consciousness for many years, and he was so continually and scientifically drunk that even his mother did not know, apart from his violent fits of delusion, when he was more sober at one time than another.

"Mother," a voice shouted.

"I be coming, my dear," said Judy Boone; and she shuffled back into the darkness and dirt.

"The can be empty."

"What du ye crave vor, Joseph?"

"Whisky."

"There b'ain't much money, my dear. Beer be cheaper, and 'twill last ye longer."

"Whisky does it sooner, I reckon. I ha' got a griping sort o' pain."

"My poor old dear! I'll just fetch ye anything that will du ye gude"; and Judy shuffled out, with the broom in one hand and the can in the other, to get the boy medicine.

Joseph was in bed, and, although neither of them guessed as much, he was not to rise up again. He had been failing for some time, without showing any sign to untrained eyes, and the night before he had fallen while coming home, had struck one of the stone posts which guarded the turn of the road where it swept round the foot of the hill, had rolled down the steep incline and banged his big body against the door. He was a gross, bloated creature, a mass of semi-decayed matter like a fungus, and the fall had damaged him where he was

poisoned. He was past forty, had hardly set foot outside his native parish, and his knowledge of the world was confined to what he had seen during the daily walk between his work and the public-house.

Obviously such a man was hardly in a fit state to leave the world. He had not used those good qualities which had been given him, and if they were buried with that big body it might well be doubted if they would grow again. Yet he was not sorry; there was no repentance in him because he didn't know that he had ever done any harm. One little incident of the past week stood out before him, and he smiled at the thought of it quite innocently, looking at it as a good joke, a bit of fun, nothing serious. He had gone to Freezabeer with another man; they were both after that good housewife, Annie Yeo, and in their state of innocence saw no fault in offering their drunken bodies for a courtship. Old Will was home, and they soon set him laughing with their tales; and at last, when Annie refused to have a word with either of them, it was proposed that Will should accompany them to the village and be sociable for once in his life. The old fellow was excited with talk, he rose to go; but Annie almost roughly pushed him back into his chair.

"You ain't going out with them, father," she said.

"Let 'en come and have a pint," said friendly Joseph.

"Father is an old man, and 'tis my duty to look after him," said Annie. "If he goes into the village I come too."

The men were beaten; but when they rose to go, or rather when Annie turned them out, Will escorted them as in duty bound to the road, while his daughter looked out sometimes to satisfy herself Will was not making off. Hearing the voices upon the other side of the fence she suspected no mischief. But one of them drew a bottle out of his pocket and invited the old man to have a pull.

"What be mun?" he asked suspiciously.

"Ginger-beer. That's right, b'ain't it, Joseph?"

"That's what I calls it," answered Joseph.

"Tak' a gude drink, Old Will. Yew wun't taste him else."

"Yew b'ain't playing no game?" Will demanded; and, having again received an assurance of the liquor's innocence, he put the bottle to his mouth and gulped heartily until a fiery feeling in his throat told him he was fooled. The bottle was snatched from him before he could drop it; the men lurched off shouting with laughter, and poor Old Will, who had swallowed quarter of a pint of raw whisky, stood coughing and gasping beside the fence until the liquor reached his brain; and when Annie came out she found her father rolling about the road, drunk for the first time in a long, hard-working life. Such a memory good-natured Joseph Boone smiled at upon his deathbed.

Not until some days had passed did it occur to Judy that the pride of her life was really ill, and then she obtained the services of the doctor when the need for them had passed. Joseph refused his food, but that was no new symptom; solid food had never been much in his way. He could still drink, and his daily cry was, "Get the can filled, mother"; but no money was coming in; there was nothing left worth selling, and for some horrible hours, until good friends heard of his plight, Joseph was compelled to suffer the agonies of returning consciousness. Then the friends came and comforted him, assured him he should not want, filled the can and kept it full, in order that Joseph might be spared the horror of awakening with a start and discovering that he was a man.

The door stood open, Judy was toiling up the hill with that much-abused can, when Mark entered. He closed the door, bolted it lest any of the friends should call with delicacies for the sick man, and advanced to the drunkard's side. He looked thin and ill, walked with a stick, coughed a good deal. A doctor might have spoken to him seriously.

"Joseph," he said, "I have come to have a talk with you."

"I hopes yew don't bear me no ill-feeling," said the sick man. Someone had told him, "Mark will be after yew vor playing that game wi' his old vaither," though Joseph could

not understand why, as it would be a very dull world if a little fun was not legitimate.

"Joseph," said Mark. "I want to talk to you in private."

"Us be alone. Mother be gone out."

"We are not alone. I am not going to sit in the same room with the devil. Shall I put him out, Joseph?"

The drunkard looked frightened. Mark was playing his usual game, which, rightly or wrongly, he considered the best, believing that human nature could only be subdued by terror. Get the man frightened and half the battle was won. He took the mug, which stood ready to the drunkard's hand, and poured its contents out of the window.

"Now we are alone," he said.

Joseph muttered something and grinned feebly, but was too good-natured and perhaps too weak to make any ado. Mother would soon be back with a fresh supply. In the meantime, Mark was sitting on the bed, and presently he put his hand into his pocket and drew out a couple of hard, white objects. They were bones, which were abundant upon the moor, the bones of animals unable to survive the winter; and he held them out, saying, with the old unpitying zeal, "I want to talk to you about these. I mean to make you sober. I am going to try and make you understand yourself better. You are dying. I stopped the doctor's cart and asked him. He told me you have got only a few more days to live. You have poisoned your body and your life; you are standing now on the edge of what you call hell, and your friends are trying to push you in, and I have come to try and hold you back. Look at these, Joseph—these dry bones. Where were they last summer? Look at them now. Think of your own. Look at these and remember you are a dying man—and there is time, Joseph—time up to the last minute, I believe. There is time at least to die a sober man."

All this sounded cruel, but there was no middle course for Mark, and he understood the men with whom he dealt. The ordinary sermon was nothing to them; an appeal would be

wasted breath; their eyes had to be startled, their ears shocked, and terror had to be struck into their minds, before they would turn out of the way. What was good or useful in the doctrine of Calvinism Mark extracted, believing that men were not to be led by soft words and kindness; they had to be driven with whips and scourged into a state of horror, just as a numbed limb may be beaten with nettles to restore it to life. Men who have never been moved by anything will scream when they see a ghost.

Whether Joseph regained sobriety, Mark could not tell, but it was certain that he suffered; for something which had long been dead responded, and there was an intense nerve somewhere which quivered like a harp-string at every hint of death. Mark did not spare; he had come to strike, and long before old Judy rattled upon the door, Joseph was blubbering, not with penitence, but with terror. His great stupid face was like that of a child crying for its nurse to come with a light; he beat his hands upon the bed and swore he had done no harm; he had been a quiet fellow, had never fought with others, had never tampered with a neighbour's wall or sought to divert his water. What evil had he done? Why should he not go to heaven? He had not set himself above his fellows; he did not say he was more righteous than any of them; the policeman had never been sent to call upon him, and, try as he would, he could not bring to mind any sin of importance which he had committed.

Mark won the day. A poor victory, but still it was something done. He knew directly he went the glass would be refilled, those friends would come again, terror would be vanquished and his work undone. But there was hope, for the drunkard gave a promise to have Mark with him at the end; and although he would make no effort to keep that promise, and could not, because his moral sense was like his mother's fine apparel, and oblivion would soon be over him again, Mark was satisfied, for he knew that the mind which could make that promise was good-natured enough to repent if he could be

there at the last with his two white bones and his parable of the lost sheep upon the moor.

Mark went on towards Tettipath and discovered when he reached the hill that it was hard to climb. The great road was against him too. Every few yards he found himself breathless, and had to stop and lean against the hedge. When he went on it seemed as if a hand was upon his chest forcing him back. It was a long walk to the valley of Tettipath, two miles from Fursdon Cross, in the centre of the village, and not a yard of it was level; and the way was very lonely, for the place was off the beaten track, the grass-grown road being much too steep for any wheeled traffic. Mark saw no living thing; the country seemed uninhabited, and as he descended, the whole wide prospect to the north became blotted out, the moor became invisible, and he saw only thick trees, the vivid green of bog-grass, decayed railings and grey rocks, and he smelt the strong mud and heard the sleepy babbling of a stream.

Tettipath was an unhealthy place to live in. It was the densely wooded bottom of a combe surprisingly steep and deep, and the cottage built upon the bog was said to be a thousand feet below the main road. The atmosphere was stifling, thick with flies and heavily charged with the odours of rotting vegetation and wild spiræa. Miasma was the genius of the place, and a choir of frogs sang his praises every evening. The cottage was little better than a ruin; nobody would have lived there who could not find another. The remains of fencing, soft and damp as a sponge, leaned in front; the patch of garden was high with nettles, the bog had encroached behind, the weeds grew faster than a man could work; and on each side those two mighty hills slanting steeply oppressed like nightmares. No wind stirred the leaves down there; the bracken-haunted bottoms seemed to stretch away for ever, and here and there was a kind of lane made visible by winter when the undergrowth decayed, where no man ever seemed to walk.

Temperance was taking in the washing, and the child with those unpleasant eyes and suggestive hair was revelling in

bog-mud; but there was no sign of Patience. Mark and Temperance exchanged glances. He saw she was not well, and what she saw she did not say. They understood each other fairly well.

"Yew'm a stranger, Mark," she said, while those calm black eyes took in the stick and the bending shoulders.

"They thought I had run away," he replied. "I haven't finished yet. I have done something to-day, Temperance. I have taken the evil spirit from a dying man and thrown him out of the window."

"What yew throws out of the window comes in at the door," she said.

"Then it must go out again. It's a question of who lasts the longest. You have got low down in the world," he said lightly. "It's hard to breathe here. Can you sleep, Temperance?"

"Ees, 'tis easy enough to sleep. I don't ever seem to waken. I be like dead in the morning, and Timothy be late starting vor work. 'Tis a long ways vor a man to walk, and that old hill vair takes the heart out o' mun."

She was looking towards that hill, which was more visible than the one which Mark had just descended, let down from the clouds like a white beam; and as trouble entered her face she turned and said quickly, "Come inside, will ye? Yew'm tired."

Mark followed, being more than tired, having seen that change of expression. He knew what Temperance was: too loyal; one to whom strength of mind was a curse and a misery. If her husband had given her a mortal wound, she would have declared with her last breath she had done it herself. If he had stripped her naked, she would have sworn he was making her happy. There was a noble kind of hypocrisy about her, but the mind which could not be denied spoke from her eyes and apologised for what the tongue said. Truth cannot be hidden for ever: lies, like strong pressure upon a sponge which looks dry but is not, will squeeze some drops out.

"That is a long hill for Timothy to climb," said Mark. "It makes him bad-tempered."

Temperance smiled and shook her head. She was more ill-dressed than ever; the old boots were bursting, and the ragged skirt was bordered with bog-mud. Her cheek-bones stood out like two rocks.

"My husband be quiet-spoken," she answered.

"It would make me bad-tempered to have to climb that hill every morning."

"If 'twould mak' yew angry, it would mak' any man," she said.

"Then it makes him?"

"My husband be a gude man."

"He swears at you."

"Squire ha' put upon we cruel," she muttered. "Timothy feels it more than me."

"You are here always. He is away all day. He only sleeps in this poisonous atmosphere, does not live in it. You have a right to feel it more than he does."

"I be only a woman. Timothy be master. I minds the home while he works."

"You are always working. You work harder than he does."

"I don't earn no money," she said. "Timothy earns the money."

"And spends it on himself. He does not even pay you for keeping his home. He does not give you his wages?"

"'Tis right vor Timothy to do what he likes wi' his own."

"The money is his; you are his. He spends you both. The money is nothing, but you are much. Temperance, your husband is a drunkard."

She looked at him, her eyes rolling, then muttered, "I ses nought agin my master."

"That's right," said Mark. "Stand up for him, defend him; but, when you have him here at home, fight him. Strike back, show your strength, fight him for his own sake, if he cannot fight for himself. Throw the devil out of the window,

and if he comes in at the door, throw him out again, and keep on until you have beaten him. You can do it; you have the mind, and that is going to conquer the body in the end. We have known each other all our lives," said Mark quietly. "I know what is in you better than you know yourself. You can reform Timothy; you have the power to save Timothy. Will you do it?"

"Aw, Mark, my dear, don't ye tell to me like this," she cried pitifully. "Timothy be my husband, and he'm a gude man."

It was useless to make any appeal. The system was too strong for Temperance. She had the power to reform Timothy, but she had not the right, for he was the master and must do as he pleased. It was not beyond her to make the home fairly happy, to prevent those horrible Saturday night orgies, to present Timothy at last before the court of heaven as one worthy of introduction; but the law forbade it, the system would be broken if she interfered. The husband was lord of his woman, his home, and himself; he was the tyrant with the power of life and death; he could condemn her to servitude for life and himself to perdition; and she could not appeal except to that court which would say, "If your husband is a drunkard and knocks your teeth out, you speak of matters which are deplorable, but comfort yourself with the knowledge that it is good for trade."

Mark left the subject, knowing that Temperance would not yield, and asked, "Where is Patience?"

That question Temperance had been expecting and was prepared for. Without looking up, for she was afraid of her eyes, she answered, "Her went away a week ago."

"Where has she gone?"

"Her wondered where yew wur to. Her said her wur going to look vor yew."

"You don't ask if I have seen her. You don't suppose I have, or that she could ever speak the truth."

"Her couldn't bide here, her said. The place made her sick and her fretted cruel vor company. Her said, 'If Mark

don't come along to-morrow, I shall go and find mun.' Yew never did come along, so her went."

"A week ago. What did she take with her?"

"A little parcel. A few clothes, her said."

Temperance looked up, and Mark was able to read what she would have said had it not been necessary to defend her sister. "Have nothing more to do with her," said the truthful eyes. "You cannot raise her up, and she will drag you down. Free yourself from her while there is time and let her go her own way. She will have it in spite of you."

"You expect her back?"

"Ees, I reckon," said Temperance in a troubled fashion.

"To-day, soon, almost at once?" said Mark sharply; and this time no answer came. Temperance moved in her clumsy way, with an old woman's step and her young woman's body, across the fern-strewn floor and rubbed her forehead with a big red hand. "'Tis cruel hot down here, and they flies vair maze a body," she muttered.

Mark rose and made for the door. "You can't hide the truth," he said. "You do your best, but it is too strong for you. I wish I had someone like you to stand up for me. I saw your face when you looked up the hill just now. You are too kind to your own people."

He went out alone, returned to the spot where they had stood, looked up and along the steep white hill, worn in the centre to a gully by winter's rain, and at the summit, in the break between the trees, and outlined against a bed of cloud, far away, high up and ridiculously small, he saw the figures of a man and a woman in a close embrace. They knew they were alone, and thought they could not be seen; yet, if it had been their wish, they could not have made themselves more conspicuous to any watcher from the bottom of the combe, standing as they were upon the hill-top against the clear whiteness of the cloud. Mark could see every movement of these pigmies of passion, and the name of the woman he could guess.

"It means freedom. Fortune owes me something. She is beyond redemption."

He crossed the inevitable stream which passes along every bottom, climbed a little way, until a cough troubled him, then rested upon the bank to wait. It was no business of his to interfere with a man who had a perfect right to pick up rubbish. Patience must pass that way, and he would be saved the climb; his way back to the moor and Freezabeer lay upon the other side, and he was short of breath. The odour of the bogs was stifling, and the flies tormented him with sticky legs.

It was a long wait, those farewells on the hill-top seemed endless; but at last the light figure of Patience brought her light character towards him. She looked well, moved prettily, and, among the green ferns, made at a distance a good picture. In the matter of appearance there was a wide gulf between the sisters: she of pleasure was soft and pretty; she of duty was hard and gaunt. Morality seemed stern in practice as well as preaching.

Patience gave a start and silly scream when she saw the man sitting upon the bank; then tripped up to him with her usual cry, "Hello, deary!"

"Where have you come from?" he said quietly.

"Where have you?" she said. "I have been looking for you everywhere and asking about you, and nobody could tell me anything. Have you been sick, deary?"

"I have been ill. I have a bad cough. I want to know where you have been this last week."

"Why, along with Tempy. Where should I be else?"

"Where have you been to-day?"

"I've been to—to—oh, a long way, deary. I like a good walk sometimes. Do you mind the walks we used to go when we were children?"

"Did you see anyone on the top of the hill?"

"I haven't seen a soul for miles. You never meet anyone in this rotten old country. I've walked all the way by my own

little self. I'm awful tired, deary. Shall I come and sit on your knee and pull your grey hairs out?"

"What have you got in that bundle?"

"Just a few old things; nothing you would care to see. Fancy meeting you here! I nearly jumped out of my skin when I saw you. Do you want to be hugged, deary?"

She came up to him, and was about to put her arms round his neck, but Mark pushed her back. "I have been having a talk with Tempy," he said. "She tells me you have been away for a week."

"What a beastly lie!" cried the girl. "Don't you believe a word she says. We are always quarrelling, and she's down on me because I go on at Timothy. I went out early this morning, before she was up, and she's cross because I didn't help with the washing."

"I have been watching you standing upon the top of the hill with some man. You have been kissing him for the last hour."

Patience knew she was caught, but it was not her way to give in until she had to; and the possibilities of lies were by no means exhausted.

"You never saw me," she said sullenly. "I haven't kissed a fellow for a long time. You know, deary," she went on cheerfully, "I have given that sort of thing up."

Mark left the bank, stood upon the round pebbles in the gully, facing her with something like loathing, and said, "I am not going to marry you."

The colour went out of the girl's face and darkness came into her eyes. Before she could say anything, he went on, "I have tried you again and again and forgiven you until I am tired of it. When I brought you back from Plymouth you promised me to give up the life, and you have continued it ever since."

"I have not. What a dirty lie!" she cried. "I have not taken a single penny, Mark."

He smiled bitterly at her idea of virtue, and continued, "I

can forgive your eternal lying, because I believe you cannot help yourself. But if you have made up your mind you will not be respectable, I cannot make you."

"I said I would be good if you married me, and so I will. But you haven't married me."

"You knew I was going to."

"Well, I should have been respectable then. When you married me I should have given it up. You must keep your promise, deary. I have kept mine, and it has been so dull. You are the only one I love," said the girl, not for the first time that day.

"What have you been doing this last week?"

"Waiting for you, deary. I am sure you are always in my thoughts."

"You have made yourself the talk of the place; you have disgraced your parents and your sister. You have held me back—I hardly know how much."

"I'm sure you are talked about enough," she said sullenly.

"You must take your own path. I promised to marry you so that you might have a chance of leading a new life. It was the only way of getting back your respectability, but if you won't take it I can't make you. I have lost you," he said to himself.

"You mean to ruin me?"

"I mean to do all I can for you. But I will not marry you. If I am making a mistake let it fall upon me," he muttered as he moved away.

It was all dark around him: there was no sign; the guide had departed, as pain departs at the approach of death. It seemed to Mark he was doing his duty; if nothing else could turn Patience from her evil ways his rejection of her might; she might see herself an outcast, be frightened, turn, and repent. Then, if his time had not come, he might save her, for he knew that as a married woman she would be respectable, not out of inclination, but because tradition would be too strong for her; she would be idle, useless, a curse, but she would be

faithful. She would not go after other men when she wore a wedding-ring.

"If I am wrong the work is spoilt," he said, as he went along, thinking of the Teign in flood. Human weakness was there, and the thought of Edith, stronger in the end than anything else, had counselled that rejection and now justified it; and no guide appeared to say whether he was right or wrong.

He looked back. Patience was standing in the gully, staring after him; but she was too far off for him to see the expression upon her face. He had expected an outburst, but none came. She had never been so silent before.

Mark went back to his work, avoiding the village street, being too ill to stand up before men, and when he saw any stranger approaching he hid himself. He was afraid of one thing, and that was arrest. Not knowing much of the law, he could not be certain whether he was safe from it; aware that his enemies would punish him if they could for daring to speak and act as a minister of Christ, not only in the streets and drinking-places, but in the church without authority and with too much truth. The mercy which had been shown to Mrs Allen would not be extended to him: he could not plead a neurotic temperament. He could only say, "I saw men following each other like sheep towards degradation, and I tried to drive them back"; and the answer would be, "They have a perfect right to degrade themselves. You are the law-breaker when you try to hinder them."

There was peace, almost too much of it, during those following days, silence listening for the wind, the calm before great happenings; the day of deeds was near. Mark hardly opened his mouth when he came to Freezabeer; and Old Will, who was getting near the end of his own great labours, talked simply of the voices which were louder and nearer. The old man did not want to explain the voices which came out of the rivers and brooks, and were made by the elements of air and water; a sound starting from the heights would travel downwards, collecting others in its course, picking up stray currents

of wind, cries of birds, movements of insects, the shifting of sand, the loosening of a rock; these blended with the music of the water to make a voice which proclaimed to Old Will concerning the weather, sometimes about a change of life.

"Us be to spit on our hands a bit oftener, Mark, if us be to finish," he said, "I hears tell o' black weather. Us mun tak' in the plats avore us goes."

His son did not answer, and when Annie tried to comfort him he left the cottage. Annie also had grown silent, and her temper had changed. She had a longing look in her eyes, as of one thinking of another land. She did her work mechanically, did not sing over it; if any man came to visit her she gave him the bitter end of her tongue. She saw her father reverting to savagery, always longing for the stones and peat, and for a shelter among them like Job Lithern's, and all that she did was wrong in his sight.

"Postman left a letter vor ye this morning," he said. "Give him me, Annie."

"I won't spare it, father," she answered.

"Postman ses he comed from London," Old Will continued. "Be 'em wanting yew there?"

"Mind your own business, father."

Old Will went forth and told the granite that Annie was an unnatural maiden.

Mark heard nothing, saw nothing; but he felt the unhealthy stillness. He cared for nothing but loneliness, and his time was spent upon the moor, except when he was sitting in Freezabeer beside the crooks, motionless and silent. He was waiting for Joseph Boone; and on the opposite side something else was waiting, not death, but the other thing; and Mark was afraid of that other thing, because of its more than mortal strength. He was always shivering with illness and a kind of excitement, very much as a wearer of the cestus might have shivered when about to enter the ring and stand up before an unbeaten opponent. One blow might kill, stun if not kill, and he would be carried out with the record of defeat, which was

worse than death against him. One man against the animal strength of a village, against death, against that other thing —what chance had he? Who was on his side? Would the allied forces come up in time, the beautiful things which could subdue human passions, the light, sunset in larch-woods, old tales of gods and heroes, dawn upon the moor, moon-lit waters, peace among the flowers, and a rest among the clouds? Closely he watched the cottage of the harmless witch at the foot of the moor. Every day he descended and questioned Judy, received her report, and went. He kept away from Joseph; it was not yet time; he could do nothing until the end, which was near; but from what he was told he knew that the darkest and most terrible ceremony in all the ritual of the system was being observed in the case of Joseph Boone. The friends came every night and sat with him, singing their songs, telling their tales, out of generosity and kindness of heart, as company for the dying man to the entrance of the Valley of Death, so that he should have no fear, not know, not think; so that he might keep his heart up and laugh to the end, and know neither pain nor consciousness; so that he might die as he had lived—drunk.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Gerard received a note from Mark:

"Necessity not friendliness compels me to apply to you. Joseph Boone of Dry Arch is on the point of death. I ask you to come and remain with him to the end. I may be wanted elsewhere."

The answer was returned:—

"I have spoken to the rector, and he raises objections. The man has been a disgrace to the place, he says, and is not, and never has been, a Churchman. He has also a number of rough friends who are likely to make a scene if they are interfered with. I may, however, go to the man and read the usual prayers."

The first stage of the battle went to the enemy. Perhaps it was not coincidence that Joseph Boone should be dying on a

Saturday night, when all the men were free, when they had money in their pockets, and nothing to do the next day but get sober. The enemy left nothing to chance. Mark waited until the middle of the afternoon, sitting on the down opposite, watching the cottage beneath. He knew the system; the fight would not begin till evening; for the friends, if they were kind, were also selfish and had their own small interests to attend to before they met to sit Joseph out. They would send him refreshments with their kind remembrances, but would not attend themselves till later on.

At last Mark went down. The same silence was over the place, and mist was hanging upon the high moor while the lower part remained clear. Judy was hovering about the door, picking up the pail and setting it down in some other place, and handling the broom as if she was trying to find out what it was intended for. Sorrow made her foolish in action, but it did not make her weep. She was simply stunned, and in that mood was ready to be led by any man.

"Has Mr Spiller been?" asked Mark.

"No, my dear. Nobody ain't been except Joseph's friends. T'others don't care whether he lives or dies, I reckon."

Gerard was afraid, or perhaps he had found something else to do, or perhaps he had forgotten. It could not matter, as Joseph Boone had no religion. It was not for him to reap where he had not sown.

Mark walked into the cottage, and found two men smoking and sitting beside the bed. The room was gloomy, the windows were shut, and the place smelt like a pot-house.

"I'll ask you to step outside if you don't mind," said Mark.

"Didn't I tell ye he'd come along?" shouted one of the men. "Here, Joseph, preacher be come to see yew."

The dying man smiled, tried to mutter something sociable, and put out his hand. One of the friends took a mug and held it to his mouth, with the remark, "Drink preacher's health, my dear."

Mark did not interfere; it was no place for brawling. He

went out and presently returned with Judy Boone. She at least could be easily frightened.

"I'll ask yew gentlemen to let Mark have a word quiet wi' Joseph," she said. "'Twill du the boy gude he reckons."

The men knew that Judy was speaking the words which had been put into her mouth, but they could not refuse to obey the mother's request. So they went; but outside there were mutterings; then they carried the news to the beerhouses, where the Saturday drinking was in full flood; and it was known that Mark had taken possession of Joseph against his will, and would worry and frighten the poor wretch instead of allowing him to die happy and peaceable. Excitement was followed by anger; there was less talk than usual, and more drink, which transported the comrades of Joseph into a state of righteousness and the feeling that something must be done for their friend's salvation.

Joseph was in his usual condition, knowing people and all that was going on, but in the last stage of weakness, unable to move without assistance, and with just enough consciousness to be aware that this was the end. What existed in him of a mind was clearer than it had been for years owing to the nearness of death; but it suggested only the horrors which he wanted to forget, and the only way of forgetting was to use the drug, not then a pleasure, perhaps it had never been one, but as a thing anæsthetic. It was the intention of Mark to retain that horror until it had been exchanged for peace.

"I be afraid. It be getting dull. Give me the drink."

Mark had again thrown out the liquor. He gave Joseph water, which did nothing but awaken his misery. Then he sat upon the bed and began his work.

For a long time there was no response. Joseph seemed to have passed beyond all understanding, and the images of a future life were to him so many mists; but death, kindly and friendly, came to the aid of Mark, touched the besotted man, played upon the almost extinct fibres of his being, stretching them tightly before they snapped for ever, throwing a wild,

startling gleam through the sodden and bog-like atmosphere, like the blue light upon the mud, revealing, not himself, but at least the fact, and the awful one, that here was the human end which was also the spiritual beginning. One circle had been described, another was to be started; and how? He did not awaken. He could not see, there was not enough light for that; and the consciousness, even as then at its highest point when the drug failed and the dirt and squalor of the little room stood out in nightmare lines, was only partial. It was wretchedness that he saw, and, behind the vile poverty which he had created, the smoky fire of some old creed, dancing devils and damnation; and the poor wretch cried and shuddered, and begged Mark to give him the one thing which would make him forget, prayed him not to waken things that were dead, but to let him sleep.

"I shall win him," said Mark. "If they let me, and if I last"; for the atmosphere of that room made him faint.

Terror had done its work; so had water; and death still helped, giving light to the long gone consciousness; and Mark went on to tell the old stories and the parables of Nature, and the great deeds won in the world and outside it; and he sought to stop those shudders and awaken the mind still more by describing the glory and pleasure of death, and the tingling expectation which should be the lot of a man awaiting it, for surely this beginning might mean so much, a change into something, like sunlight or moon-mist, a roaming through space, a journey to the stars, and the sense of pain gone for ever; and what was in this awful room a human body might be high upon the moor, something as fine and subtle as the breath of flowers. There was no imagination in Joseph, but death lent him one, and he smiled a little and confessed the parable was good, but he was not a gentleman, and these things were for his betters. He had always been easy-going. If he had not lived well it was because his luck had taken him into bad company. He had always consented, he was too good-natured to refuse a friend. He did not know why Mark

should make such an effort to awaken him and compel him to try and think upon matters which he could not understand.

"He can see," said Mark. "He is nearly conscious."

He went out to find Judy, picked up the old Bible, opened it, saw that it was scribbled over with spells and enchantments; and with a frown he tore these pages out, arousing no tempest from the world of darkness nor thunder from the moor above, and not even a protest from Judy, who, perhaps, did not put too much faith in them.

"His friends will be coming soon," said Mark. "We must keep them out. Whatever happens we must keep them out. I shall want you to sit with Joseph, and read to him, Mrs Boone, until the end. I will show you what you are to read," he said, shivering with zeal and illness.

"I will du whatever yew bids me, master," said the old woman, giving Mark a title, as he had become glorified in her eyes, and she could hardly recognise the son of Will the stone-breaker. "I knows, master, yew would du my poor boy gude. I'll sot by the bed and read—I will, master, till I ain't got no eyes left."

Before it was dark, during that interval between sunset and night, when a procession becomes solemn, the congregation of friends came from the village. Dry Arch was apart from it and the cottage away from others. The men were in various stages of drunkenness; none of them wishing to be brutal, but all desiring to be kind, to help an old comrade in his need, and, above all, to proclaim their independence and enjoy their rights. They acted by instinct, the same which makes the calf try to use its horns before they have grown and compels the hen to sit upon sham eggs to hatch them. They did not think, they had no knowledge; they were drunk by instinct; they came to Joseph Boone by instinct; they would have started him upon his death flight grinning by instinct. It was the mistaken kindness which is murder.

The door was closed. One knocked, and it was opened, but not by Judy Boone. A weak man stood there leaning upon

his stick, a poor creature, smaller than any of the company, but with a mouth and eyes that told of fighting. Quietly he told them that Joseph was sinking fast, his mother was with him, and no one else could enter.

"Us ha' come vor company," came the answer.

"He does not want you."

"Us be agwaine to see Joseph."

"You shall when he is dead."

"Knock 'en down! Pull 'en out on't! Run over him!" shouted the voices from the back, and those who were there pushed forward, while those who were in front pushed back. The majority of men are cowards, and a drunken crowd is without resolution. It can only stagger to and fro and think it is making progress with its noise, like a dog barking at a burrow and believing it will bring the rabbit out. A resolute man before them is like a wolf among sheep. They stare at him, wondering what he will do next, or which way he will drive them, concentrating all their energies upon that stare to the exclusion of everything else.

Mark took the only course. These men were beyond all argument; they would not listen to him when sober and now they could not. So he defied them. He stood in the doorway, and said, "Not one of you comes in here while Joseph lives." He lifted his stick, shook it, and said, "I'll break the head of any man who tries."

In the gloomy room, with a crack of window open that the big Joseph might escape that way, Judy Boone was reading, the book lying upon the bed and her withered body bowed upon it; and Joseph was listening. He could hear also the noise outside, the roaring of his friends and their threats to destroy the keeper of the door, and it was to him a storm afar off, the agitation of the horrible tempest which was receding, for those friends were now his enemies; they were the creatures rising out of the smoke, the devils of the house of terror which Mark had pictured for him. Had they come in he would have recognised and welcomed them as the kindly beings who

would bear him company to the dreadful junction; but not seeing, and only hearing, he believed them to be the devils, and he knew he was escaping from them. His pain had departed for the moment; he, too, felt strong, as if to-morrow he would do some work, and, as consciousness increased, he became peaceful, almost happy. His mind had never been so clear. He forgot those daily walks to the beer-house, and remembered the cherry-tree covered with white blossom and his old mother, and he was unhappy to see her so badly dressed, while, without knowing it, he was repeating aloud the words that she read. He had thought himself dying and he was waking up.

It was getting dark. Black clouds were rolling from the moor. There had been one rush for the door, but, directly the man there put out his hand, those in front put forth their strength, not against him, but against their comrades. They were afraid of that white face. Had it taken its eyes off them, or shown any signs of yielding, there would have been a rush which would have swept the way clear, and they would have gone in triumphing. Not a man touched the bent figure; not a man dared, for it was too strong for them. It was the rock which could not be shifted, though it might be worn away. They could only make a noise, shout and push each other about, and some were quarrelling, for there was no unity in them, and they were filled with that which makes a man hate his father and curse his mother.

"Stand aside, Mark, will ye? Joseph be craving vor a bit o' company. Let us in to mak' the poor soul happy."

They tried to entreat poor Joseph's keeper, but he took no heed. He did not move, nor did he speak, but stood at the door, and looked at them with the same stern, white face which never altered and the eyes which frightened them.

Joseph was still listening, but hearing little. The great division was beginning, but the dirty little room was filled with the old romance, and the shouting was nothing. The beautiful things were there, and they were pleasant after all, for who gets weary of the monotony of sunsets? There was a light in that

room which made thought free, but it was going away, and he had to follow, taking his mother and the book with him. Joseph was learning in his last hour, like a man reading by dim candlelight, his eyes fixed upon the lighted page, the union between eye and light and light and page, so well established, until the candle is blown out. It was flickering, the flame darted up and down—and the shouting devils were still behind.

There was a riot outside. Others had gathered beside Dry Arch, hearing what was going on, and sober people were crying "Shame," and taking the part of the white face at the door; and some of the drunkards were taking off their coats. Two big miners pressed against Mark, but when he touched them they fell back. They surged about the door, yelling like madmen, but he did not stir. One fastened a lantern to the end of a pole, and held it up and pushed it against his head, but he did not move. Another, far gone in liquor, with protruding eyes and thin, sucking mouth, rubbed a foul rabbit-skin upon his face, but he did not give way.

Nature which had tried Mark now aided him. The black clouds settled, and the rain began, a few large drops, then a downpour. The crowd acknowledged itself defeated. The men were not afraid of another man's death; they were not afraid of vice or of drunkenness; but they were horribly frightened of the rain, or at least they acted as if they were, although, perhaps, they were glad of the excuse to get away from those eyes. They ran in terror of the raindrops; and the work was over. Something had been done. The fight was won.

"He made a gude end, master," sobbed old Judy Boone. "He made a gude end."

CHAPTER XXIV

ABOUT THE NIGHT

AFTER Joseph's funeral the fence in front of Freezabeer was torn down, Annie's flowers were eradicated, and when morning came it was seen that an attempt had been made to burn the place. Stone walls, iron roof, and wet weather had prevented that. Old Will departed to the plats, pretending not to notice; and when his daughter spoke he declared beasts from the moor had rambled there and pushed the fence down; as for the fire, she had caused it herself by throwing out hot ashes. The old man would not acknowledge that Mark had brought hatred upon him; and even when rumour reached his ears how that the apostle of conscientiousness, George Vid, was going from cottage to cottage in his pleasant friendly way mentioning that Freezabeer was an eyesore and a plague-spot which must be blotted from off the face of the moor, old Will said nothing to Mark. He put the blame upon Annie. She was so unpleasant to the men, and pushed suitors from the door, calling them drunkards. He felt cross with Annie for making him unpopular, and he talked about it every evening until she pushed him upstairs to bed. Will meant no harm, but he was getting back to childhood, and the hard spirit of the rocks was in him.

"I won't come to Freezabeer any more. Wherever I go they will follow. They mean to wear me down," said Mark to his sister; and she replied, with worldly wisdom, "Get out of the old place. You said you were going, and now's the time. You're sick and thin, Mark."

"I can't get away, Annie. I'm a prisoner, and I've got to stay to the end."

"End of what?"

"I don't know myself. When I get the order to go I will, but not before."

"You can't do any good here. You might as well preach to the stones."

"It's what I am trying to do. I have been dealing with stones the whole time. No ears, no eyes—only mouths."

One stone had been removed, but another remained. Patience was the great obstacle. She had to be won, and, if he could not conquer her by marriage, some other method must be tried. It was difficult to find the way, but, if a little more time was granted, it might be shown; and Patience, like Joseph Boone, should be built into the wall.

"All the fellows are against you," said Annie. "That George Vid is to the bottom of everything."

"And Squire Vivian. If it hadn't been for him and the rector, some good might have been done. You can't help one man without interfering with the rights of others. You can't conquer a vice without upsetting trade. I know I have been attempting the impossible. I knew it always. But the way was shown, and I had to go or be false to myself."

"Where are you going, Mark?"

"I have a garden there," he said, nodding towards the moor.

Annie appeared about to say something, to make a confession, but she did not. She held out her hands, and said, "Good-bye, my old dear."

"It's not good-bye yet. I shall look in to see you sometimes."

"You don't know. Good-bye, Mark. Give me a kiss."

He kissed Annie on both cheeks, and went away with a bundle on his shoulder, casting one longing glance upon the great white road; and then he made for the moor, to look for a sign; and he was not to see Freezabeer, Annie, or his old father again.

The weather was bad, so he turned aside presently and made for Job Lithern's hut, but the door was closed and fastened. The deaf man was not working on the plats; the iron tools were lying about among the granite chips, and it occurred to Mark that no progress had been made lately. Surely Job was not beaten; nothing but death could tear him away from the rocks, and he could not be dead or old Will would have heard of it.

The weather became worse, and Mark left the moor, driven also from that, climbed the road, turned off to the left before reaching the old turnpike, where Wreford was huddling over the smoky peats, murmuring, "To-morrow be Thursday," and began the long descent towards Tettipath. He would be safe there for a time, on account of its distance from the village; and perhaps when with Patience some way would be shown—if she had not gone, if he went on living, for he knew he was ill and a high temperature accompanied him.

"This is Friday," said Mark. "To-morrow will be Saturday. I may be able to help Temperance."

It was Patience who opened the door. She looked at him, said indifferently, "Oh, it's you," and turned her back upon him; while Temperance came forward and welcomed him.

"Will you take an old friend in out of the rain?" he asked; and she replied, "Ees, surely."

Mark went in and received a surly welcome from Timothy, who feared, but did not like him, while Patience went upstairs and did not appear again.

Later on, when Timothy had gone out into the moonlight to cut a trench which might carry off the superfluous water rising at the back of the cottage, Mark saw a question in Temperance's eyes and told her what had passed between Patience and himself; and she answered quietly, "I knows."

"What do you think of me?" he asked.

"I reckons Patty b'ain't the one vor yew," she said; then added, "Her wun't be biding here."

Mark did not press her with more questions. She was

divided between loyalty for her sister and regard for a friend, and she had no ready use of the tongue to help her. She wanted to be fair to both, and questions would have forced her to be false to one ; but before leaving Mark, something, which seemed to be duty, prevailed. She came close to him, touched his arm with an awkward movement, and said, "Best ha' nought to du wi' she, Mark."

"I must ask you one thing," he said quickly. "Is it necessary for Patience to leave you?"

"Timothy don't know yew b'ain't going to marry she. He would ha' turned she out else."

"They still quarrel?"

Temperance did not answer ; and nothing but her silence was required.

The next day was dark and tempestuous until noon, and then it cleared. Mark left the bottoms and made for the high lands, to get some air and shake off the atmosphere of the swamps. He had an idea of opening Church Beer on Sunday, if his strength served him, which seemed doubtful, for he could do nothing except lie about on the rocks and watch the clouds. Towards evening he descended and smiled bitterly as he passed through a portion of the village to see the children running from him and the women who were drawing water from the pumps turning their backs upon him in terror of the evil eye. He had cast a malignant spell upon the place. It was known how he had bewitched Joseph Boone. It was notorious that bad passions were aroused by the mere sight of him. The women threw away the water, which he might have looked at, and drew more.

There seemed nothing to do except walk about and breathe the air and keep himself alive. Helplessness rose up against Mark and made him torpid. In trying to help others he had done for himself. He was the enemy of the people. Righteousness shook its head at him. He was friendless because he had sought to be a friend. Patience was always in his mind. He had not spoken to her. She had gone into the village as usual

on a Saturday night, and Timothy would be there too, getting drunk according to custom, and perhaps he would abuse his wife, and then Patience would attack him. Mark would have to do something for the sake of old times.

Trifles irritate memory as midges worry the skin, as the shifting of a little sand may cause a landslip, as a small keystone knocked aside may bring the big rocks down rattling. There came to Mark the smell of sour apples. It was a trifle, but it brought back the memory of Love Lane. It was a midge tormenting him with thoughts of his walks there in earliest years with pretty little Patience; and the desire came to walk there once again, since the Love Lane of life could not be his. Perhaps he would be able to think more clearly there, see the future forming, and the way out and beyond; perhaps he might meet with Patience, as in the old days, wild and foolish, but not yet a mass of corruption; and the symbol of Love Lane might still be realised after the weary journey through the field of furze, the field of heather, and the field of granite towards the light. So he turned to the high road and the tall beech-hedges which nearly hid the hard and stony mouth of the narrow lane; and he went because he had smelt the sour apples; and the wind had brought him the smell for some purpose, that the sand might begin to trickle and the keystone be knocked aside.

There was Blue Violet deserted and crowded with nettles, the roof half-off, and the windows out, for the squire was having it rebuilt. According to a local saying, he would not place a pig in a leaking sty. Mark could still see the two paths made by the feet of Temperance, one to the pump, the other to the faggot-stack. It was not dark, for the moon was full, the sky was cloudless; and he could see the paths like human veins curling between the nettles; and the spectral trees made shapes against the sky blackly, and their roots were fantastic knots along the hedges where the owls hooted and big wood-pigeons flapped. It was Love Lane at night.

It was easy to hear sounds all along it, because of the round

pebbles which rattled when trodden on. Mark had often listened to old Caleb coming up pushing a perambulator, which had once carried Temperance and Patience, then filled with groceries and a few sticks laid across which the careful old fellow had dragged from the hedges of neighbours. As he stood watching the round moon resting as it were upon the chimney-top of Blue Violet, he heard again those shifting pebbles, and he drew back, not wishing to be seen. A man was coming up, after him a woman. There was a sound of wild laughter, followed by a struggle as if the path had become hard to climb; and then the woman's voice, "Get home, you brute!"

Timothy staggered past, broadly grinning, and beneath his arm was a pair of shears, the points protected by a leathern sheath. He had been that day cutting off the wool from the hinder part of sheep, a dirty job, and dangerous for the operator, and in his drunken and half-divine condition he still clung to the shears as if they meant to him a fortune. Near him was Patience, who was not opposing his ramblings. She seemed indeed to be guiding him back to Blue Violet as if she meant to lose and leave him there.

Mark had crawled upon the hedge and looked down upon them. He saw Timothy stumbling through the gate of his former home like a pony returning by instinct to an old stable. He saw Patience go after him and close the gate. In the deceptive moonlight he could see little of her face, yet the whole figure seemed to express a shape of indifference, of one who had nothing to lose and cared not at all what might happen. She must have waited for Timothy, well knowing the state he would be in; and she had led him towards Blue Violet, persuading the poor fool that he lived there still. Mark knew that the one bright spot in her character was a fondness for Temperance. She would herself abuse the sister, but it made her mad to see another, even a husband, lift his hand against her. Mark went on looking, anxious to find the motive; and then, but not till then, did he completely realise the utter hopelessness and degradation of drunkenness, the

depths which the thing called man could reach, as he saw the slim, weak Patience take this burly fellow by the neck and throw him down upon the stones.

Timothy growled some oaths, but did not seem angry; he was in a besotted state, too far gone to feel much, and he imagined that the girl was merely having a lark with him. He shouted and cursed, muttering something about, "Wait till I catches yew"; and not even the words, "I'll learn you to knock Temperance about," reached his intelligence with any sense of danger. He did half rise, but Patience pushed him down, and the next moment Mark was struggling from the hedge.

"Drop them," he shouted with all his might.

The girl screamed with terror. She had picked up the shears and pulled the sheath off. She fell on her knees, the blades gleaming in the moonlight. As Mark came up she flung them down, then screamed as though a devil possessed her. She turned towards Mark, with her hands up like claws, mad and half-choking, and howled at last, "You have followed me again. Now you can follow me to hell."

There was not light enough to see whether there was blood upon the point of the blades; but Mark bent over Timothy and discovered a wound in his neck, very slight, a scratch he could not feel, but it might serve to let his life out.

"It would have been better for you if I had left you on the streets," he muttered; but the girl was gone. The stones of Love Lane were rattling once more, and above those sounds came back sobs and gasps and cries for mercy as of a soul in terror.

"She knows. She meant it."

Patience went towards her father's house, neither knowing nor caring where she ran. She could get back to Tettipath that way, but it meant a long circuit. She had lost her head, or, perhaps, she was afraid to return by the village and be seen. She went through the court, banging both gates, sobbing, and sometimes screaming as if something followed her; and Caleb awoke in the barn and cried out with her. The robbers were upon him. The burning of the books had done no good: his

senses were looser, his mind was more deranged. With a shivering hand he turned up the lamp which he kept always lighted, made for his treasure, dragged it out, cast it upon the bed and his body across it, while his skinny hands grasped the gun, and his tongue made a litany for churls in peril.

Timothy stood upon his feet in excellent spirits, grinning, shaking Mark by the hand, greeting him as an old comrade, and suggesting they should go in search of some house where liquor might be had; but the other man was dumb. His mind was clear: he was able to think again, he could see the way into which he had been led by the sour smell of apples, and it was lit with fiery torches. Was this the way, the only way, by which Patience could be saved; and could he offer it? Was it not too much to ask, too great a sacrifice? And yet if it would be accepted as the something done, if he could point to the little wall built with the souls of Joseph Boone and Patience, and say, "That is my record"; if he could only say that out of bodily weakness had been drawn spiritual strength which had enabled him to stand up, it might be enough, it might be received as the work of a genius who has produced what none else can.

"We must get along," he said to Timothy, who was babbling like an infant, though less wisely; and when they got into the lane he began to shout. Mark had those shears in his pocket. He was taking Timothy down to the farm, intending to leave him there while he went for the doctor's aid, acting for the best, unable to suppose that by doing so he could harm his old friend Caleb Starke; but it happened as they went along the lane that Timothy became more riotous; he howled and sang, he imitated the voices of a dozen other men; he divided his fool's personality into several, one shouting for help, another promising it, a third blaspheming. The poor wretch was enjoying himself, it was the tragedy of mirth with that scratch upon his neck, which he did not even know was there; and Mark walked beside this reeling creature, his face white and his eyes terrified.

So still was the night that even when they started from Blue

Violet Caleb heard those shoutings. His ears had already imagined other sounds, rustlings, and whisperings; but these at least could not be mistaken for delusions. The man was old, mentally afflicted by long watchings over that money-hole, and now he was in a state of staring terror. The robbers had come in a battalion; the court was surrounded; the ladder leading to the barn creaked, and it seemed to him that shoulders were trying to lift the trap; and the moonlight streaming in at the cracks could be nothing else but the light of their lanterns. Caleb made no noise, but his cunning went to work; he could not fight these rogues, nor could he defend his treasure; he must outwit them and hide the money, put it in some place where no man could find it. But they would search everywhere, strip him perhaps, burn the barn. Money and corpses are hard to hide.

The shoutings came nearer, the gate of the court screeched on its hinge, old Caleb chuckled. He had found out the way. He would put the money in a very safe place, drop it into his grasping old soul; and if they killed him he would beat them all and death too, for he would take the money away with him and start in the new world rich. He put a sovereign into his mouth, swallowed it, and took another. They were spoonfuls of honey, and they passed easily down the shaft of his throat and dropped into the mine.

Ten pounds were safe from the robbers. He reached for the crock of water, because his throat was getting painful; he gasped and coughed, but went on insanely chuckling. The water proved a brave ally; first a gold coin, then a mouthful from the crock, a gulp, a straining; and so the sovereigns were deposited where thieves could not break through and steal; while the shoutings went up from the court, where a dark figure reeled to and fro, and another walked straight for the door.

"Drag the old man out. Burn the barn. Knock him on the head, and get the money"—so the old madman heard, and did not recognise that it was only the drink which was at the bottom of it all.

Barseba slept hard, as those hours of rest were none too many, and at daybreak her hand had to be back upon the regulator. Those knuckles thumping the door were kettledrums of doom to Caleb. He made a fresh effort, which left him choking; but thirty pounds were safe in the inviolable blessing-box.

At last the hard worker came down, still heavy with sleep, half persuaded she was ridden by a nightmare; but she soon awoke when Mark spoke, told her what had happened, how Timothy had been pricked with the sheep-shears.

"Fetch 'en in, and I'll wash the wound."

"I'm going for the doctor."

"Bottles o' medicine b'ain't no gude to he. Mak' 'en stop that noise. He'll be waking the master, and he'll be out wi' his gun and shoot the lot of us."

Mark hurried off; but, before he was across the first field, he heard the familiar shouting and looked back to see Timothy reeling through the moonlight. He would not let Barseba touch him, had mistaken her for Temperance, and lifted his fist to her; and then, being of a social nature, he pursued his comrade, supposing Mark was going into the village to get a drink. Timothy was not going to be left behind with the women if there was beer in Fursdon and a companion to drink it with.

Mark could do nothing with the man, who would not go back and insisted upon following him. That scratch should have been attended to at once; but, instead, Timothy was staggering about in a state of excitement with the poison spreading in him. The only thing to be done was to take him to the doctor, since he would not remain behind. This was easy, for Timothy followed like a sheep, cursing at Mark because he went so fast.

They went by Rose Ash. There was still a light upon the ground floor, passing from one unshuttered window to another. The squire was home again, haunting his passages, lighting his footsteps with a solitary candle, glad to be back, muttering to himself, "I like Spiller. He's as obedient now as the little

dog. I am sure he is quite grateful to me for getting him out of the clutches of Mark Yeo. Dangerous fellow—almost a criminal. He attacked me like an angry bee, but when a bee stings it dies. I don't think Mark Yeo will sting again."

The two figures were passing along the road, which skirted one of the lawns, and the squire heard the distant shoutings; for the spirit of Timothy was still merry within him.

"A man going home. It is Saturday night, all the day of rest to get sober. Mark Yeo is quite right. They do drink too much, but I am sure it amuses the poor things. I ought to do more for them. I don't think I am very popular. I seem to do very little for the poor things. I will erect a large tent on the lawn some day, and invite them all to come and drink and eat as much as they can hold. And I must do something for myself. I will read and acquire more knowledge. I used to think I should like to edit the Pauline epistles. I will think about it to-morrow. I like St Paul, and the editing of his epistles would amuse me, I think."

He opened a door, then drew back. He was always opening the wrong door. He departed along the passage, smiling, working his way gradually towards his distant bedroom. No evil would ever befall him; he had been cursed, but nothing happened; he could drink a poisonous thing, and it would not harm him; he was a clumsy rider, but his body would never be carried home with a broken neck; the falling branch would strike down the old woman who was gathering a few sticks from his woods, it would fall clear of the master; the lightning would smite the lower granite and the Yeos, not him. He would not meet disaster, for he was at the top; the black and sullen rock of the tor which cannot be worn away because it is the hardest of all, and so it remains unchanging and untouched; and those who fall against that rock are broken.

The right door was opened, the stooping figure passed through, the candle light receded, the mutterings died away. The passages were silent, and the pictures seemed to be turned against the wall.

The doctor lived on the far side of the village; but he was not at home and not expected back, as he was watching a patient miles away. A country doctor is always out. There was nothing to be done except to go back to Tettipath in the bogs, after leaving a message for the doctor to call next day. On the way Mark tried to wash the wound at one of the brooks they crossed, but Timothy would not let him. He thought Mark wanted to play a practical joke, and put him in the water, which he had no love for. He was not going to be washed like a baby, and he certainly would not drink.

Old Will descended from the plats shortly before Mark made his fatal entry to Love Lane; but no smoke was curling from the single chimney of Freezabeer, and when he entered, the place was desolate, the black hearth gaped at him, the table was bare, he saw no preparations for the evening meal, and over the place was that grim silence which suggests desertion. The dogs sniffed about uneasily, and whined for their mistress. Will walked to the foot of the stairs, and called his daughter.

"Annie, where be to, my dear? I be cruel hungry, Annie"; but the silence was not broken.

He went upstairs. Everything was very neat in Annie's room, and the window was partly open to admit the air, and there were a few flowers upon the sill. She had always been a perfect housewife, Will remembered; and now she was away. Her clothes were gone. Annie had disappeared, weary of the old man's temper, tired of what seemed to be ingratitude, but was only peevishness. It is fascinating to slip away quietly from a state of life which seems a failure, and Annie had yielded to it. She had taken advantage of the moonlit night to go out and walk towards a clear new life.

"Annie be abroad," said Old Will to the dogs. "Her wur allus a teasing maiden."

To get his meal ready was no new thing, for he had always prepared his own breakfast, as he could not expect Annie to get up at daybreak. There was an abundant supply of food, and when Will saw it with his one weak eye, he remarked again

that Annie was a good housekeeper. Everything had been done so well, it seemed to have been done naturally; and now, when he had finished his supper, all things appeared to be in confusion. Next day would be worse. There had been human method in the magic which had made him comfortable.

"I can't spare Annie," he said. "Her mun come home agin"; but he knew Annie, for she was his daughter and Mark's sister. He had hurt her somehow, had frightened the spiritual part of her, and she would not come back, nor would he ever hear of her again.

Will walked about heavily. He could not sit down with his pipe and draw consolation from tobacco, as he did not smoke, and he could not settle down. Still he was free: he could do as he liked, there was no voice telling him to sit down in the old chair or reminding him it was bedtime. Will remembered he had never really objected to be ordered about. Annie always knew what was good for him, and she had guided him well. He lifted the money-box and peered into it, shook his head when he perceived she had left it well filled, and murmured crossly, "I be afeard o' thikky money." He wanted to find some excuse for abusing Annie instead of himself, and could find none. He had never been allowed to spend the money; he hardly knew how to do so; the little coins had a ridiculous smallness after the great, heavy things he fought with, and he felt inclined to fling the lot outside and tread them into the soil. The dogs watched him uneasily and would not sleep.

"The mune be bright," muttered Old Will. Then he shouted: "Who be telling I to get along to bed? I'll get me back to the plats."

He made his way out, then up, stumbling sometimes, for the light of the moon was deceptive, and what looked like a shadow proved often to be a hole. The breeze met him, and as he got higher he heard a rushing sound like the onward sweep of cavalry, and knew he had come to the brook, which made a silvery streak right down the moor, and had a voice

which told of changes. Will never passed that brook without drinking from it, being full of superstition, and regarding it as a stream of life because the water was golden. He drank and went on with the dogs, and saw at last Job Lithern's hut, like a child's plaything made of stone, and he made towards it, hoping soon to hear the deaf man's roaring. He and Job were kindred spirits; they had worked near each other for so many years, each playing the same music of the rocks, the hammer of the one answering the jumper of the other; and now there was nothing between them: both were alone, living and working for the same object, coming to the end with a like purpose in view, the finishing of those walls which time and man would spare, and perhaps regard as the going forth to labour of mere folly. As the father laboured, so had the son; building the wall where it was not wanted, splitting the stones, placing them in a rude position, so that any idle hand could push the structure down, and the idle tongue could sneer at it as "Yeo's Folly."

Job's hut was without a window, and no light came from beneath the door, which was fastened, not by bolts or keys of modern science, but by large round rocks which had not to be rolled inside, for the walls had been built about them. Will knew it was no use knocking. Job would be in the cart which was his bed, asleep or at supper: but why without a light, and why the door secured against the moonlight, and why that silence, neither bellowing nor deep breathing nor the sound of a moving body? The dogs were whining and scratching at the door.

"Now I comes to think on't," muttered Old Will, "I ain't seed Job vor more'n a week."

Placing his shoulder to the door, he put forth his strength, but the rocks were stronger than bolts. Will walked to the wall, lifted a slab, and returned, bowed upon it, huddling it like an infant; then threw it down, mounted upon it, and battered the upper portion of the door. There was a noise of rocks falling in a kind of avalanche. An entrance was

forced through which the dogs rushed wildly; and at last Will himself got in with a hand upon his nose.

"There be a mucky lot o' rats, I reckon."

It was mercifully dark, and Will had no matches. He stood, making queer movements, ducking backwards and forwards; and finally, being a man of strong nerve, he advanced, put his hand into the cart, stirred it about, then lurched to the door, spitting. He did not require a light; even the moonbeams refused to enter there. Here was the reward of solitude, the end of a life given to the rocks. Job Lithern was there, and the rats were with him.

A kind of passion came over Will. Never had he felt so strong, so lustful after work, though he had worked all day. That elementary passion was lent him by the moon; it was an insane thing and dangerous, daring him to be a genius and do what man had never done before. Job's tools were beside a rock too great for single combat. One side was white, sparkling with mica where a slice had been cut off. It had beaten poor Job, had given him a mortal wound; and now it mocked Old Will.

He laughed and pulled his coat off. He spat into his hands and laughed again. He muttered "Seventy-five last birthday," then stood over the rock and gripped it. He forgot he was upon Job's plat, fighting the dead man's granite, when his own was not yet vanquished; but he felt himself a better man than Job, a living lion, more of a giant; and he said within himself he could move that stone and roll it out, even as the old giants had rolled them out and hurled them for sport down into the far-distant valleys.

He lay upon the rock, strained, and a moan seemed to come out of it rather than from himself, but it did not move, for the spurs of it were deep rooted in the peat; and all that stirred were the muscles, heart, and sinews of the man. There was danger in the moonlight, which makes a mortal boastful.

His right eye, which had been knocked out many years ago, seemed for a moment to have its light restored; then,

as he bowed himself again, pain went through his left arm, shot fiercely through his neck, and he lay upon the rock quiescent. The moon had gone behind a cloud, very dense, for the moor was black; there was no gleam of light upon it, no rock beside him, and no sky. Never had he known the night so dark.

"Where be the mune to?" he cried, lifting his rugged head, staring into the blackness. There was no getting away from that dense, dark cloud.

"They ha' been and struck I in the face. I can't spare the eye, master, vor 'tis the only one. Give me back my eye?" he shouted, shaking his fists into the horror of darkness. "Give me back my eye, will ye? God Almighty, what be doing wi' my poor old eye?"

The dogs came to the old stone-fighter, whose day was over, whose night had come, whose plats would never be cleared, whose walls would not be finished. He drew a piece of twine from his pocket, fastened it to the collar of the older and more sensible dog; and presently they passed away, very slowly and cautiously, towards deserted Freezabeer, and there was the sound of a stick always tapping as they went through the brilliant night. The last strain had been too great, that final effort had detached the retina of his sole remaining eye; and Old Will would never see the day again. Victory was with the granite.

The father had finished his fight, the son was entering the last phase of his, but it was not sad, for tragedy makes a man sublime. And life is a tragedy because death comes to it; and all life is sublime because it ends; heroism is forced upon it. As there is no remembered pain in birth so can there be no sadness in death; though a man may shrink from it he would not wish to avoid it. It is merely sunset and next day may be fine. Not to die would be a comedy, a little and a shameful thing, making men contemptible. It is better to go off with a song than a wine-skin, else, when it is time for the next entry, there may be some among the audience who will

not have forgotten the wine-skin and they may call the character comic. The sorrows of great men have been recorded, but not their laughter; the sorrows of their lives have made them great.

Mark descended the long hill leading to the heavy mists of Tettipath, with Timothy beside him, stumbling and reeling, even as Old Will was doing at that time. He had passed the convivial stage, and was getting querulous, regarding Mark no longer as a good comrade, but as one who would be likely to lead him into trouble; so he swore at him, bumped into him, and told him often to go to the devil.

A dark figure waited beside the rotten gate and came forward slowly to meet them. Timothy had never been so late in coming home, for it was then midnight, and Temperance had been sitting up watching the steep hill, knowing something was wrong, because her sister had returned more than half-crazed, too wild to speak plainly, but making her imagine the worst.

"Mark," she said, "what be wrong wi' Patty?"

"I will go and see her," he answered, and producing the shears from his pocket gave them to her.

"Wash his neck at once, if he will let you. He has been pricked with these."

Without glancing at her face he went, climbed the stairs, and entered the horrid little room which Patience occupied. She was sitting on the bed, staring towards the door, sobbing and shivering. There was no lamp. The moon gave more light than was wanted, and Patience was like her father, as he had been listening for footsteps, dreading the coming of those who would kill.

"You know what you have done?"

"I didn't, Mark. He did it himself," she sobbed, lying to the last.

"Why are you so frightened?"

"They will say I did it. They won't believe me. He put up his head and the shears touched him. I didn't mean to hurt him, Mark—deary, don't tell them I was there."

"I saw you. I watched you uncover the shears. It was deliberate. The man was drunk and helpless, in your power. You thought nobody could see. You hate him for being a bad husband to your sister, and you led him to Blue Violet that you might kill him."

She went on staring and shuddering; her prettiness had departed from her, and the foolish mouth dribbled and worked as if praying for mercy, but the lying tongue was dry.

"You are frightened," said Mark quietly. "Terror has come to you. It will never leave you. All the days of your life you shall never be able to get away from the memories of this night. You shall see Timothy and me, you shall see Blue Violet and those poisoned shears. Every time you smell an apple-orchard, hear an owl hooting——"

She began to scream. Only Temperance heard and then she knew. It was the confession of Patience Starke.

"If you escape, how will you live?"

She sobbed and cried aloud. It was not quite penitence, but terror, which, as Mark had guessed, would always remain and haunt her life.

"Answer," he said, coming forward and touching her.

"Marry me," she groaned. "I will be good."

"It is too late. One of us must pay for this. Listen to Timothy below there swearing. He won't let Temperance touch him. You know what it means; his small last chance has gone. If you are not the one—what will you do?"

"Can you get me off?" she screamed.

"There is a way. Will it do you any good?"

"Deary, I'll change my name; nobody will know me. I'll cut all my hair off. I'll make scars on my face. I'll make myself so as no man wouldn't look at me. I'll work hard, and I'll be honest, deary."

"Tell me the truth. You hate Timothy?"

"Yes," she muttered with an effort. It was so hard to speak the truth.

"You had it in your mind to do away with him?"

"Yes, for Tempy's sake."

"No," he said. "Think again. To satisfy your own desires?"

"Yes," she moaned.

"That child," he said, pointing to the side of the bed. "It is yours?"

"Yes."

"There is another?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the workhouse."

"You will claim it, work for it, do your duty by it?"

"Yes."

"You have never liked me?"

"Oh yes—yes."

"You wanted to marry me for the sake of your reputation?"

"Oh, deary," she sobbed.

"Answer with the truth," he said sternly. "You have never cared for me?"

"No."

Mark gave a sigh and smiled. He had driven out the lying spirit, and Patience was his.

"Did anyone see you leaving the village with Timothy?"

"No," she moaned. "I waited for him outside."

"Say nothing," said Mark as he turned to the door. "Only remember."

He went down and found Timothy in a noisy sleep, and beside him Temperance doing what she could. She looked up, and their eyes met in the old searching way,

"I was going to say something to you, Temperance," he said. "But it is difficult."

"Best say nought, Mark—my dear," she answered.

"Is it very bad?" he muttered, looking at the sleeper.

"Vull o' dirt," she whispered.

Mark looked out from the door. Moonlight and mist were beautifully blended, and he could hear the frogs croaking

dismally like misanthropes; and in his mind there was, though he would not show it, the horror of the end.

"You'll look after her?" he said.

There was no answer.

"I think she will keep straight, but she may want a hand now and then. You must keep her to duty. If she seems likely to break out again, remind her of this night. Keep the terror before her. It's the only way."

He heard a groan behind him.

"Show her how to work. If she had been taught that long ago, we should not have been here. It's the idleness that kills. I think she will be good now."

Then he turned and said sternly, "Temperance, my dear, you must say nothing."

The woman moved away in anguish, staggered across the floor, went out: and Mark could hear her sobbing in the moon-mists.

It was the dawn. Old Barseba was staggering about the court, laughing hysterically. It was not a pleasant sound, for there was sorrow in it, and not a little fear, but no one heard her; only the fowls looked up, chuckling uneasily, and the mild bullocks stared in sheer amazement. She staggered, because of the great weight in her apron; she laughed because of that burden. The white hair was blown across her eyes, tears rolled down her cheeks, and still she laughed and cried:

"My wages! I ha' got my wages. My master! My poor old master."

Here was the reward of those long years of labour. Her apron was filled with gold. She had counted until she had become dizzy; she had reckoned up to seven hundred, and there was more, the bottom of the hole had not been reached, the long-deferred pay was hers. She staggered into the parlour and poured the wonderful heap upon the stones; then stood staring first at one hard hand, then at the other.

"I ha' worked wi' this," she shouted. "And wi' this. And here be what 'em made."

CHAPTER XXV

ABOUT THE DOOR

TIMOTHY'S illness was not long. Neglect in the first instance lost him a chance, and the ignorance of a doctor, who knew less about such matters than most countrymen, deprived him of any. The medical confidence was of the usual kind when the professor of it came on Sunday and was annoyed to find he had been dragged down that hill to attend to such a trifle. "Only a scratch. You can get to work to-morrow"; and when Timothy complained of his head he was told that was as much as he deserved if he would get drunk on Saturday.

The system, which had to be broken on Sunday, was still heavy upon Timothy, therefore on Monday morning he got up and went out, but presently dragged himself back. He could not climb the hill; he felt queer, "couldn't hardly put one leg avore t'other," and his eyes seemed full of mistakes. So he took to his bed again, and could not even whistle; and the next day the doctor had to come again, and was surprised to find a serious case of blood-poisoning with a very high temperature. He gathered some information, new to him, concerning the nature of pricks with sheep-shears, obtained the assistance of a colleague; but when they came to Timothy he was too ill to be moved; and two days later he died in the swamps of Tettipath, while in the meantime rumour had been busy, and it was known there had been foul play. He and Mark Yeo had quarrelled over the drink; Mark had lost his temper in the usual way, and had wounded him with the shears. There was no doubt about it, and the name of Patience was not even mentioned.

Temperance was not given to talking; but every day she begged Mark to take up his bundle and disappear along the road, while her sister said nothing and remained in a state of shivering terror. Mark always smiled and shook his head, and said it was no use going, as the road was watched, until he was served with a summons to attend the inquest. Then he showed signs of weakness; illness was increasing upon him; he felt alone against the world, and was sorrowing also for his father, who was beaten. Old Will was about to sell Freezabeer and his much-loved plats for what they would fetch, hoping to gain sufficient to pay for his board and lodging with some family for those years of darkness which might remain. Mark shrank from adding another burden to the old man's load. When the fatal day arrived, and Temperance pleaded once more, he still refused, but with less resolution, and she was quick to see it. She made him come out with her, led him to the entrance of the little lane opposite the cottage—it was merely a cart-track overgrown with trees—and pointed to it. He might escape along the dark and densely-wooded bottoms, among the swamps, and lie low in the bracken, which was ten feet high. That mind of hers worked well; she could not only think but observe. Spiders had thrown their fine gossamers across the mouth of the lane in such numbers as to form a network, the dew-covered threads of which passed right across, waving lightly up and down, showing that neither man nor beast had passed that way.

"Go under, Mark. Do ye now," she prayed; but for the moment he did not understand.

"If yew lies down yew can crawl under they," she went on, pointing to the innumerable threads. "When yew ha' gone a bit yew can stand up and walk. 'Tis the only way down into the bottoms. If they comes after yew, and I shows 'em the webs, and how 'em b'ain't broke, they'll reckon yew ain't gone down. Go in, my dear. I can't abear yew to be took. They wun't find yew down under when yew gets among the vern, and I'll fetch ye some food out here to midnight."

Mark hesitated, then gave way, partly to please Temperance, and partly because he wanted a few more hours alone, to wander among the things of beauty, to try and think a little, and search once more for the missing sign; and then he went down, wriggled his thin body beneath the gossamers for some dozen yards, rose, and looked back to the sad-eyed woman separated from him by those fragile meshes, while she waved her hand to him and wished him good luck.

"I'll see yew to-night," she called.

"You will see me before then," he muttered, as he walked away into the chilly twilight of the ferns.

The inquest was held, not far away to suit the convenience of the coroner, in a small public-house upon the top of the hill on the opposite side to Fursdon. As it was a working day few came except those who were summoned. The principal witness was Temperance, and she described how her husband had come home in the middle of the night with Mark, who was carrying the fatal shears. Timothy, she had to confess, was drunk.

"Did Mark Yeo say anything to you?" she was asked.

"He told me I wur to wash my husband's neck."

"Was there any ill-feeling between the men?"

"They never had any words that I know of," she answered.

"The views of this man, Mark Yeo, are well known. No doubt, he tried to impress them upon your husband. Did you ever hear him?"

"No," said she.

"If he had tried to do so, your husband would probably have resented it?"

"My husband wur a gude man," she said stoutly.

A constable approached the coroner and whispered something to him. Soon the jurymen were informed with some emphasis, "It appears that Mark Yeo has absconded. He should, in my opinion, have been arrested on a justice's warrant. I do not see how the inquest can be concluded without him, as he seems to have been the only companion of

the deceased during that fatal walk; but we can, of course, draw our own conclusions from his absence."

There was a murmur from the jury, every member of which had already considered his verdict; and then a sheep-farmer was called to give evidence.

"It is well known, I believe, that removing wool from sheep may in certain cases be called a dangerous occupation?" said the coroner.

"It is not so well known as it might be. It is dangerous to sheep and shearers alike," came the answer.

"It is necessary, I believe, to secure the service of skilful shearers?"

"When you can get them, but they are hard to find nowadays. A man who is at all clumsy and is continually pricking the sheep is a curse to his employer. Last year nine of my own sheep died after being pricked by the same man. The smallest prick is sufficient."

"What happens in these cases?"

"The sheep spread all over black, and are dead in two hours."

"You have known cases, I suppose, of men getting pricked with the dirty shears?"

"Yes, several."

"What happens?"

"Blood-poisoning sets in very quickly. Shearers are aware of this and guard against it."

"Remedies to be of any use must be applied at once?"

"Yes, the germ is a very powerful one."

"Is this a matter of general knowledge?"

"I am afraid not."

"A man brought up in the country as a farm labourer would be aware of it? He would know that by pricking another with the dirty shears he might be committing something very like the crime of murder?"

"Yes, I should say so."

The doctor followed and gave evidence that Timothy had

died from blood-poisoning caused by a wound in the neck, which had been made undoubtedly by the shears. The wound had been neglected, and it seemed that very little blood had issued. If more had escaped the germs might have been removed. Everything possible had been done for the man, but he had not been able to attend sufficiently early.

"Could the wound have been inflicted by the man himself while in a state of intoxication?" he was asked.

"It would hardly be possible, as it was situated at the back of his neck."

As he spoke there was a stir in the place, and a kind of muttering as of pleasure, for Mark had entered, looking small, very thin, and pale. In a gentle voice he apologised for being late. He had taken the last walk, had seen and heard nothing, and, the sense of duty being still strong, he had toiled up the hill to come and face that jury, every member of which hated him as one who would destroy the custom of the land.

Temperance looked at him; those eyes met once more; then she burst into tears and hurried out.

"That woman knows, but won't tell," the coroner muttered. Then he went on hurriedly, as he had pleasures awaiting him, "I think there will be no difficulty in arriving at a verdict now. Your name is Mark Yeo, I believe?"

"The Reverend Mark Yeo."

The coroner grinned, while the jurymen laughed aloud, and even the dignified constables made mocking noises. Mark took no heed of them. He looked straight ahead. He was only present in body, and his mind was wandering along by the Teign, which was thundering, in the company of a sweet, sad face with shadows beneath its eyes. This trial by ordeal was a small matter; the door was opening outwardly, and there were fine prospects upon the other side. The next room was full of light.

"We needn't go into that question," said the coroner. "These fancy preachers always call themselves reverend," he

muttered. "Will you tell us whether you were with the deceased man upon Saturday night?"

"I was."

"And you quarrelled with him?"

Mark gave no answer.

"I suggest that you took the opportunity of lecturing the man upon his condition, and that he resented it?"

Mark said nothing.

"Then you had a scuffle, in the course of which you wounded the man, whether intentionally or not is for the jury to decide, with these shears?"

There was no answer.

"You have a perfect right to reserve your defence," the coroner went on. "But your silence will compel us to arrive at certain conclusions."

Mark's lips were moving, and the policeman who stood by him caught a few words, which were not meant for anyone there. It was the cry, "Why has it forsaken me?" Mark was not thinking of that little court, held so appropriately in one of those beer-houses which had caused Timothy's end and his own failure: he was away from it and was searching for an answer to the riddle, looking for the sign to tell him if he was going right, and listening for the inward voice which had once guided him.

"You must speak up, if you have anything to say," said the coroner sharply. He was prejudiced against these temperance orators.

"It is this," said Mark clearly, with a touch of the old manner which ordinary folk mistook for madness, knowing nothing of the fire which burns in some men, making them look inwardly, and speak about what they see and feel there: "The sign which has been with me all my life has been taken away. It came to me first upon the moor, when I was a little child, and there it went from me. It was taken away upon the banks of the Teign. The river was in flood. I had to get across, and the rocks bruised me. And when I got over the

sign was gone, as if the river had washed it away. So I do not know whether what I am doing now is right or wrong, for I am in the dark, and nothing guides me."

The coroner stared at him, the jurymen looked at one another, shaking their heads, and there was again that horrible heavy laughter. These dull fellows could only laugh by way of answer. Had anyone shown them a flower and described its construction, they would have laughed; had anyone spoken to them concerning the religion of the beautiful, they would have laughed. It was the way they showed their knowledge of life, their superiority to common objects, their contempt for poor minds. What was the good of beauty, which had no commercial value? Let all the ferns be rooted out, because there was no money in them, and the foxgloves be dragged from the wall because the cows would not eat them; and let the man, who spoke strange words, be confined by himself in some place where he could not disturb the ignorance of others. There could be no argument with that philosophy, the doctrine of dull stones, which see and hear nothing, and only crush and kill when they move. The man who stands up to preach the religion of equality in all created life, from the lowest weed to the highest man, for growth, instinct, and memory are common to all, algæ, animals and anthropoids; of the necessity for the highest development of that life to retain those powers of growth, instinct, and memory intact, not with deliberate malice to impair and kill them; of the mysteries in which truth lies hidden; of the voices and signs coming by way of genius, by sleep and visions, by divided personalities, by trance and possession, and by phantasms—that man is condemned as a heretic, and sentenced in one age to the stake, in another to obloquy; for he stands outside.

"The man's mental condition will have to be inquired into," said the cheery, red-faced coroner, who knew something about law and easy-living, and how to please everyone, though his mind was like an out-of-date directory, and he said nothing with which his great-grandparents could not have agreed.

He summed up to the jury, begging them to be just, and not to allow their prejudices against an unpopular man to weigh at all in their decision. It was clear that Mark had passed a considerable time in the dead man's company during that fatal night. They had learnt how he had returned with Timothy, carrying the shears with which the wound had been inflicted. There was no evidence to show that Mark had any particular ill-feeling against the man, but, as they were aware, he was death to all drunkards, and it could not be denied that Timothy was drunk upon the night in question. How the wound had been inflicted they did not know, and Mark would not tell them. His silence might be taken as a suspicious feature, but he had a right at that stage to say nothing, as he was undefended. If innocent, he was clearly not then in a position to prove it. Probably there had been a fight. The wound might have been caused accidentally, or in self-defence, although it was necessary to remind them that its position, at the back of the neck, did not favour this view; but if they accepted that, then the verdict must be one of manslaughter, as he did not consider it could be a case of justifiable homicide, for the deceased was drunk, and practically helpless, and Mark must have known what a dangerous weapon he was holding. If, however, they decided that the wound had been inflicted with a deliberate attempt to do grievous bodily harm, their verdict must be one of wilful murder.

The jurymen hoped they were just, but they could not get away from the idea, suggested by the squire, that Mark was a dangerous character, and so they chose the latter alternative; and Mark was committed for trial on the coroner's warrant.

He had maintained silence, and was removed to silence. No message came to him. The world was dumb so far as he was concerned. He had no friends. Hardly a man would have signed a petition on his behalf. Only the weak and the noisy obtain mercy; not the merciful or those who are pure in heart. It was the way towards the door, which was beginning to open,

and there was plenty of light beyond; and perhaps the old sign would be waiting for him there.

Only one day he passed in the cells, and the next was removed to the infirmary; and it remained for a shrewd old doctor to deliver the final verdict:

"Murderer, is he? Well, so he is. He has murdered himself. The man is completely worn out. He's going to appeal," said the old man, smiling at his small joke. "He's going to the court above."

CHAPTER XXVI

ABOUT OBSCURE HISTORY

TOM and Eli, in that order of precedence, entered the pink cottage, the last carrying peats, the first a dead rat, and presented themselves before Ted and Oli, who were forming mental images of a fire, as the atmosphere had turned woolly and cold.

"It be snowing, my dear," said the peat-bearer.

"It wur raining when I looked out. Weather seems to du what it likes," replied the stoker.

"B'ain't no butes neither," said Eli.

"Plenty o' vegetables," said his brother proudly. "Mucky weather will bring the butes along."

Boots to mend meant meat for the brethren; but whether they came or not there were always vegetables, for Oli was superior to such matters as good or bad seasons. His vegetables never failed.

"Posies tu," reminded Eli. "What lasts for ever and a bit longer when yew dries 'em right."

He referred to the everlastings, which had been a vast success that year. The room was gay with them, all along the mantleshelf and pushed into unused crockery and above the pictures, making the place look like the interior of an Italian church. It was true they could not be eaten, but the brothers were able to appreciate those things which pleased the eye, and they considered flowers were of use to make them wise.

"What wur that?" said Oli, looking up suddenly from the dry thorns, which were beginning to crackle.

"It wur something in the nature of a knock at the door, my dear. 'Tis my turn."

"Butes!" cried Oli.

He was right, and they were broken, but not brought to be mended. One stood in them, with confidence running over, and announced when the door opened that he had travelled all the way from Exeter, through very unpleasant weather, with merely one object in view, and that was to attend upon the large gentleman who stood before him and mend his clock. He presented a card and described himself as an itinerant clock-mender, and was not ashamed to add that he stood alone in his profession, although in which direction he did not state.

"Hast ever heard of my young brother?" asked Eli, with some suspicion, as there was too much love upon the stranger's countenance.

The little man had large eyes, and Oli was by no means insignificant as he crossed the floor, so the answer came that, not only had the clock-mender heard of the second brother, but had passed through life with the simple faith of meeting him some day; a hope now realised since he saw him face to face.

"Hast ever heard of our old clock?" asked Oli with sternness; and the travelling one, who lived by his wits and a few odd tools, declared that also was an old tale, for the robust grandfather, which he perceived standing against the wall decorated with helichrysum, like an old gentleman about to go courting, was as well known to the present generation of clock-makers as he was himself; which no doubt was nothing but the truth. "I'll just step in and put him right for you," he added.

"He be all right," said Eli.

This remark was received with derision. The little man had also a large tongue, nor could he have made a living without it. He was himself like a clock which is never accurate; relying on his face which was a kind of brass dial, open and shining, but not truthful; and his hands pointed falsely, and the

gong of his voice struck upon large words which bruised and wounded simple folk. "Itinerant" was one of these words. It had an apostolic sound to Eli and Oli. "Dissolution" was another; linked to such a one as "immediate," the effect was stunning. Simple people were not going to say they couldn't understand such language; the speaker was not likely to confess he couldn't either; and so the profession of tampering with clocks proved a lucrative one, owing to a stock-in-trade of words possessing four syllables.

"This clock," he said, looking very insignificant in its presence, something like Jack before the giant, "is a particularly ostentatious development of premature English art. And it is in jeopardy of immediate dissolution."

If he had said in current language that the clock was a good specimen of early art the brothers would have understood, which for professional reasons was not desirable. As a matter of fact, the clock was in far better condition than the little man's boots, and the tools in his bag were intended to bestow upon it a kind of neurotic temperament which would make the visit of a confederate quite a necessity.

"He be the best clock in the country," said Eli.

"In the world," added Oli.

This fact the visitor was aware of, and said so in ordinary language. Returning to the former style of vicious rhetoric, he reminded the brothers how heavy was the responsibility which they incurred by the possession of such a clock. It was their duty to hand it on to a succeeding generation in good repair; and he assured them in a style beneath reproach that the grandfather was even then struggling for mechanical existence, about to give forth its life with one last despairing tick; something more than coincidence had surely brought him that day through the rain, snow, and sunshine, so baffling was the weather, with his small bag of revivifying tools to be present at the precise moment when the clock was about to fail and become indifferent to the fugiting of time—such was his expression—to arrive during the final hour when it was still

possible to seize that time, so to speak, by his historical forelock and preserve a singularly choice example of the clockmaker's art from being relegated to the scrap-heap. In that whirlwind the brothers became dizzy. The English language was represented to them as a ship at sea tossed by mighty waves. Their old clock was in peril of being run down in every sense. The giants were conquered by the tongue; Eli opened the oak case with the reverence of one displaying relics; Oli observed that the anatomy looked free from bile; but the little man laughed, filled his hand with weird instruments, and plunged into the works like a terrier after rats.

"If I had come to-morrow I might have been too late," he cried excitedly.

"He did stop one day," Oli admitted incautiously.

"'Tis a wonder he ever went again," said the itinerant gentleman, who was half-inside the case, after the manner of a sweep clearing a chimney.

"Old Ted had his last lot o' kittens in him," declared Eli.

"Old Tom went in after a mouse," added Oli. "I b'ain't sure she didn't catch that rat——"

"She got him in the garden," interrupted Eli. "I saw she catch him."

"If you have cats, rats, and kittens inside the clock, it's no wonder he's pretty near dissolute," said the wrecker, who was dislocating the grandfather as well as the English language.

The brothers trembled at this process of vivisection, and it troubled them to behold various portions of their old relation lying about the floor; but, as the mechanician reminded them, the only way to restore a clock was to dismember it and then put it together according to the rules of modern science. This was what he tried to do, with a certain want of discrimination, and when the old clock began to tick in an erratic fashion, which was explained by its restorer to be a sign of complete rejuvenation, he was pleased to drink tea with the brothers, and rejoiced to present his bill, which shocked them, since it amounted to no less than three shillings and sevenpence half-

penny, which seemed a large sum of money ; but the impertinent little man reminded them that great masters are entitled to charge more for their services than little ones, and he had come all the way from Exeter on purpose to pay them a professional visit, and it would be necessary for the sake of a wife and family to return thither again, and anyone else would probably have charged seven shillings and threepence halfpenny and have made a mess of the clock into the bargain.

It was the odd halfpenny that disturbed the brethren. They could not perceive how the man justified it, and his explanation that it was the custom in all trades to add an extra halfpenny over and above the amount due did not altogether satisfy them. However, Eli went to the money-box, produced four shillings, and at the same time discharged four exclamations ; and, after much delving in apparently bottomless pockets, threepence in coppers were dragged forth and handed over. This did not appear correct, but the brothers could not play mathematical tricks in their heads, so Eli went aside to work out the problem, while Oli guarded the clock-maker lest he should bid them farewell too suddenly.

"It b'ain't right," said Eli, who was hard at work with a piece of burnt stick, describing figures six inches long. "He gave we drippence, and there be an odd halfpenny."

"That's it," said the clock-breaker. "I gave you a half-penny too much."

There was a groan and a gurgle in the room, and the clock stopped.

"They always do that," cried the visitor, stepping across jauntily. "It's a sign of renewed activities. They've got so much strength when they are just mended they hardly know how to use it. Wonderful human things these old grandfathers ! I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't stop half a dozen times this evening. But when he does go, my friends," he cried with enthusiasm, "you will have Greenwich time in Fursdon when you like. I wish you good-day, gentlemen."

"Hold on a bit," shouted Eli. "Seven and a half from

naught leaves four and a half, and carry one shilling leaves naught, and us gave yew four shillings, so he owes we four and a half, and he gave we drippence, and drippence from four and a half leaves one and a half."

"So you owe me a penny halfpenny," said the little man's large tongue.

"'Tis vice versa," said Eli.

The man had to pay, and did so, being unwilling to remain upon the scene of his handiwork. He scurried off down the road with his destructive tools, to enter another cottage and play the same game. No doubt, he found it hard to make a living, and there was plenty of tramping through bad weather to get a few shillings, and, having no skill, he was driven to use his large tongue that he might prevail over the simple-minded; and so dishonesty, first defensive, became offensive; and all was justified by the necessity for living.

Men and cats stood in various positions upon the concrete of the living-room, and all were staring; Oli at the grandfather, Eli at the money-box, Ted at Tom's rat, and Tom at the new-born fire.

"Black be lucky," said Eli.

"White be unlucky," said Oli.

They had always said so. Black rain brought no disaster, but when the white feathers were thrown about there was a certainty of misfortune. The snow, which was then muffling the garden, had brought the clock-breaker, for the grandfather ticked no longer, and time had ceased to be; and Eli had made a discovery. Placing the money-box on the table, he turned it over and two coins rolled out; both shillings, old and battered, twins of their mother, the mint. He gave one to Oli, the other he placed in his own pocket, then went and looked out of the window to hide his face; for Eli could appear most owl-like when it pleased him to be mysterious.

"What be yew agwaine to du wi' your shilling?"

"Buy rope," said Oli.

"What vor?"

"To tie round that fellow's neck. Yew ought to be ashamed o' yourself," said Oli.

"Well, I b'ain't," said Eli. "No man need feel ashamed when he ha' got a shilling in his pocket."

"Yew'm an old man," said Oli bitterly. "Old and vulish."

"How old be yew?" asked his twin brother.

"Look at the grandvaither!" said Oli.

"Look at the money-box!" said Eli.

"That fellow ha' been and broke the clock, and yew let him in. Us ha' been put upon, and 'tis your doing. I be old, and yew be vulish."

"Yew'm an onion," said Eli.

"Yew b'ain't a daisy, neither," said Oli.

Then they laughed, felt better for the insults; and presently resumed the dialogue:

"No butes."

"No money."

"Grandvaither broke. Us can't tell the time."

"Snow falling. Us can't get abroad."

"Us ha' been cheated."

"Us ha' been robbed."

"Us will be in the house vor Christmas."

"Us will be on the parish."

They seemed very cheerful, although the prospect looked black enough. Winter upon them, boot-imports falling off, and the money-box empty. Eli had made that discovery when he went to get coins for the clock-wrecker. They had always been hard-working, thrifty souls, had saved a great deal, and now it was all gone. Thieves had apparently made paupers of them.

"Our travelling days be over," said Oli. Then he asked sharply, "Where be my old teapot?"

"If yew'm telling about the teapot wi' red roses on him, I ses he'm mine."

"He b'ain't," said Oli. "Vaither said I wur to have him. What ha' yew done wi' my old teapot?"

"Mebbe I dropped him on the floor, and he wur tored

abroad," said Eli cheerfully. Then he looked round the walls and asked suspiciously, "Where be my old warming-pan?"

"Mebbe I ha' sold him vor five shillings," said Oli.

"Then yew owes me two and sixpence," said Eli.

The brothers laughed again, and had to remind themselves seriously they were ruined.

During the following days, when a thaw came and everything was in liquidation, some boots were brought, and the brothers attended themselves to small jobs; but the atmosphere of "immediate dissolution," as the unworthy clock-mender would have described it, remained. Twopenny jobs would not buy meat nor keep them clear of the workhouse. Eli impressed these facts upon Oli; while Oli complained bitterly of having entrusted his youth and innocence to the care of an elderly brother, who was little better than a profligate. Oli still searched for his teapot, which was covered with roses, while Eli appealed to what humanity remained in his brother to get back the warming-pan, as his feet were frozen every night, and his bed was as cold as a skating-rink. Both adhered to the former story; the teapot was smashed, the warming-pan was sold; and when Eli declared he should go and see a lawyer about it, Oli reminded him mockingly he had no money to pay for advice. Neither brother could venture into the other's bedroom without infringing boundary rights; but each room had an open door, and, as there was no treaty directed against peeping over the frontier, Eli thought he had seen a familiar handle protruding from beneath Oli's bed. And while they looked at each other darkly the old clock remained silent, there was no sun to consult, and the evening and the morning made a short day. The oil had failed, and there was no money to buy more.

"What be yew agwaine to du Christmas?" asked Eli.

"I be agwaine to travel," replied Oli.

"Yew ain't got no money, and yew can't travel on an empty stomach neither. Us will ha' nought but tetties and watter," said Eli, with the utmost happiness.

"I means to enjoy myself," declared Oli. "I reckons to ha'

gude food, a proper dinner, my dear, such as squire sits down to."

"'Tis a cruel pity us be ruined," said Eli, with something like pathos in his voice, looking affectionately at the old young-minded child opposite. "What would yew fancy, my dear?"

"Ox-tail soup, and a dried haddock, and a gurt big bit o' beef, wi' dumplings round him, and a pudding wi' a bit of holly stuck atop, wishing yew merry Christmas. I wouldn't ha' no turkey," said Oli. "He don't fill a man's belly. What would yew crave vor, my dear?"

"I'd ha' the like," said Eli.

After that the brothers changed; they became more silent, hardly ever laughed, seemed to be almost afraid of each other; and yet they chuckled sometimes when alone. Eli looked at Oli sorrowfully, while Oli regarded Eli as if he would apologise for being young and foolish. There seemed to be a lack of understanding between them, blessings had departed from the pink cottage, some sort of evil was at work. Two sixpences were paid them for professional duties, and Eli called Oli to witness that both coins were deposited in the empty box. The next day there was only one sixpence; the day after the other had gone. Things were getting serious. The brothers were living on vegetables, while Tom and Ted were on the brink of revolution. Ted was expecting a family for the fifth time that year, and required nourishing food, while Tom went house-hunting with a view to finding another master who would provide a more liberal diet. The curious part about it was that the brothers did not feel inclined to inform the policeman, nor did they show any particular desire to discuss their misfortunes; but one evening, when it was getting too dark to see, Eli introduced the subject by remarking that something was taking place which he couldn't understand at all.

Oli explained that was precisely his position.

"That be the truth, my dear? Yew be vair mazed when yew tries to think where all that money be got to?" asked Eli sternly.

"I be," said Oli with unquestionable sincerity.

"So be I," said Eli; and they regarded one another in a puzzled fashion.

"The old box wur vull o' money, vair running over wi't, and now he'm empty," Eli went on. "And if us puts any money into him now, where be it to?"

"He be gone," said Oli with a mystical wave of his arm; and then they discussed witchcraft in its relation to money-boxes.

On the Saturday before Christmas, which was the great shopping-day, the brothers decided to go for a walk, but not together. Eli slipped out early, and Oli followed later on, and as usual they both went the same way and were very much astonished when they ran up against each other in Okehampton. Eli explained that he had succumbed to a perfectly natural longing to press his nose against shop-windows, while Oli declared he felt it his duty to go through the market and judge whether it was up to the standard of former years. They didn't feel inclined to remain together, as it would have been painful for both, without money or prospect of a Christmas dinner, to behold all the good things displayed and the faces of holiday-makers; but as they separated the same thought was in the mind of each—neither could make out where all that money had gone to.

How they reached home that evening never became historical, because the facts could not be clearly ascertained. Eli's story, indeed, always remained in the mythical period since he would refer to a wild mysterious journey through dense woods, across swollen torrents and boulders and bogs; and he would have damaged himself badly, perhaps have been stugged altogether, had not a lot of little people surrounded him with red torches and brought him safely out upon the road. Eli's was a poetical journey. The passing of Oli seemed more prosaic, as he had a distinct idea he had never swerved from the road; but he spoke of a large chariot, which seemed to partake of the nature of a motor-car, and how it had drawn up at his

side full of queens and princesses who compelled him to join them, wafted him to Fursdon, then vanished in a pungent cloud and were seen no more; and this, too, had a ring of poetry. The truth was not obtainable; but out of all the myths emerged certain facts, one of which was that Oli reached home first, possibly by virtue of the fiery chariot. It was certain, because when Eli arrived, breathless and distinctly muddy, his brother was sitting over the fire expressing the sense of financial ruin by singing at the top of his voice and drinking fragrant tea; and Eli noted that Tom and Ted were licking their chops as if they had recently partaken of savoury meat; nor did they evince a desire to do anything but sleep for the rest of the evening.

"Have ye seen the fires, my dear?" cried Eli.

"What fires?" asked Oli.

"Okehampton be vull of 'em. Just you run up to the top o' the road and look over."

Oli went off in his innocence, while his brother scurried back to the hedge, groped about there, then staggered into the house and up to his bedroom—to put on his working-coat; and when this was done Oli returned, saying he had seen no fire.

"I didn't neither," said Eli.

"Yew told me Okehampton wur vull o' fires."

"Well, my dear, volks want 'em this cold weather"; and then Eli desired to know why Tom and Ted were showing signs of repletion.

"I bought the poor toads a penn'orth o' lights," Oli confessed.

"Yew seem to ha' plenty o' money. I ha' half a mind to say yew never come by it honestly," said Eli wrathfully.

Oli took no notice of this, and invited his brother to partake of tea, which he did and became cheerful. There was no oil for the lamp, but the fire gave enough light to talk by, and Eli observed how he had been by the workhouse and thought it would suit them, while Oli said the beef in the market was better than ever, and, in respect of one prime piece, he had broken the tenth commandment and very nearly the eighth.

"I ha' a mind to say us will pass a merry Christmas," he observed.

"On tetties and watter," added Eli. Then he asked jeeringly, "Where be your dinner coming from, my dear?"

"If witchery can empty the money-box, I reckon it can bring a dinner along," said Oli.

"Where be my warming-pan?"

"Where be my teapot?"

There were no answers; but the brothers entered their rooms presently with more ritual than was customary, Eli muttering to himself, "The old teapot b'ain't broke. Wun't my little brother stare when he sees the table! I'd like to know if he ha' been playing any game"; while Oli grinned as he murmured, "There be the old warming-pan what he fancies I've been and sold. My young brother will mak' some faces when the day comes. I'd like to know where all that money ha' went to." They always thought alike, these two.

On Christmas Eve the mystery play was continued by these children, who had discovered how to enjoy themselves in a place where no pleasure existed beyond the one which brought ruin upon it. There was one little piece of work to finish during the morning, and in the afternoon Oli disappeared. He had not yet forgiven Eli for these wonderful adventures that last day of travelling. He was not absent for long, and by the time he was back Eli had cut a quantity of holly from the hedge behind the bee-hives, and stood in the middle of it polishing the old brass candlesticks; and, what was more wonderful, the lamp on the table was shining with a fair grace. The place looked very warm and comfortable, even if it was a home of the poor destitute.

"Where did the oil come from?" asked Oli.

"If yew can buy a penn'orth o' lights vor the old cats, I can buy a penn'orth o' light vor the lamp," replied Eli.

"Yew seem to ha' plenty o' money," said Oli, delighted at the opportunity of getting the remark back at his brother.

Something else, however, pleased him far more, and he went on to tell of it with rapturous exclamations. "I ha' beat yew, my dear. I ha' travelled where yew ha' never been, and 'tis no gude yew going now, vor I ha' done it; and yew'll ha' to put your brains together, aw and your pennies tu, avore you gets me down under agin, and so I tell ye."

"Be yew telling about munes and airships?" asked Eli rather crossly.

"I be telling about Fursdon town," cried Oli triumphantly.

Thereupon Eli informed Ted that "his" master was more insane than usual, and informed the master that he didn't wish to hear any tales of a traveller concerning Fursdon, where he had dwelt for more than fifty years, and "avore yew wur born."

"Warn't us born together?" cried Oli.

"I wur first," said Eli. "I beat ye by a neck."

"It ha' never been proved yew wur first."

"It wur proved to our baptism."

"Well, if I comed last I ha' allus got up avore yew in the morning, and I be avore yew now. Yew know the Bible Christian chapel, my dear?"

"I knew the fellows what built him, and I mended their butes——"

"Yew goes up a little piece, and then yew comes to the old blacksmith's shop what bain't working now."

Eli began to bite his nails, and distress came over him as he muttered.

"I ha' often heard tell o' that shop."

"Yew ha' heard tell on't," cried Eli. "Mebbe yew ha' heard tell o' the little road t'other side o' the shop. About fifty yards long he be, and there be dree cottages on one side, and two on t'other, and a pump in the middle. And what I wants to know is, when did you last walk along that bit o' road?"

Eli's despondency increased, and he could only observe that he had known Fursdon intimately before it had pleased Providence to present him with any little pestiferous brothers.

"I ha' been and walked along that road," declared Oli, with

the conceit of one who had just planted a flag at the North Pole.

"I be beat," said Eli. "I ha' lived in Fursdon all my life, but I ain't ever been in that part o' the village. Yew wait till I travels agin," he went on. "I'll get me to the place where that king lived what curate was telling of Sunday, the king what had half a mind to et grass like a rabbut."

"Babylon it wur," said Oli.

"Aw, I'll go there, and walk down the Fore street, and come along home again," promised Eli.

The brothers peeled their coats off, as they were energetic in every movement, and began to decorate the cottage according to old custom; holly above pictures, and stuck into every china figure, and when there chanced to be no berries they would make them by stitching red flannel around dry peas. They did not permit a barren season to beat them; and while they adorned the place they sang tremendously. Usually Oli whistled while Eli sang, but on this great evening both used their voices. It was the blessed time of the year, the one night upon which enchantments failed. If their money had been taken away by some spell of evil, it was possible it might be returned at midnight. When the room had been decorated they stood opposite one another with radiant faces and sang like two cantors. They knew the old songs, which are better than the new, and they shouted them all—it could hardly be called singing—but it was well done; with their hands clasped, their bodies swaying, and their heads put back, these simple giants filled every nook and cranny of the cottage, made the night hum for two hundred yards, and caused Tom and Ted to twitch in their sleep, as they roared the fine old English words:—

"'Tis Thou that crown'st my glittering hearth
With guiltless mirth,
And giv'st me wassail bowls to drink
Spiced to the brink.
Lord, 'tis Thy plenty-dropping hand
That soils my land;
And giv'st me for my bushel sown,
Twice ten for one."

Ruined they might be, but they did not show it. They were wealthy with high spirits and contentment. They had mastered the great art of harmless pleasure, making it for themselves out of the circumstances of their daily life, and refusing to descend to pleasure ready-made and shoddy. As they went for the stairs they patted each other upon the shoulder and made vague promises of Christmas presents.

From that parting up to daybreak the mythical period was entered on again, and the undoubted facts of history were not resumed until breakfast. Eli and Oli both had Christmas dreams presided over by good fairies, and it was possible that in moments of wakefulness each wandered about the house. Undoubtedly apparitions passed through, which should not have been on Christmas night. Owing to the broken-down condition of the grandfather no time could be specified; but Oli admitted that something very like an earthquake had occurred during the night, while Eli was also positive that a second seismic disturbance, which in his view partook more of the nature of a landslide, took place not long afterwards. Whether the brothers themselves were responsible for this shifting of the earth's crust did not appear; but it was accepted later on that both did descend to the living-room at different periods of the night, anxious to discover whether any telekinetic doings of a spiritual kind had occurred during the hour which ushered in the benignant influence of the Christmas festival. According to tradition, Oli was the first to materialise in the living-room, with very cold feet and a box of matches. The money-box had been left purposely upon the table empty and open, as a hint to any power of darkness charitably disposed to subscribe; and the response had been satisfactory, for when Oli struck a match, opening a small world of reality about him, he perceived that the box, which was by no means without magnitude, appeared to be half-filled with precious minerals, which by process of the mint had been disintegrated, made circular and current as pieces of money, part *argent*, and part *or*.

Later in the night, but still in the dim and cloudy period which preceded history, Eli appeared in the wan vestment of the cult of Morpheus, and was also granted the vision with the aid of a tiny scrap of Swedish wood capped with paraffin; and to him the box appeared quite full and brimming. After that the cocks began to crow, and the prose facts of history struggled into prominence.

Not altogether, however, for a period of art-mythology remained, representing Eli and Oli as two colossal figures of stone bending over a money-box, one time removing, another time restoring, one half of the contents; two great shapes, but only one mind held in common making them act alike. If Eli thought of abstracting half the money and secreting it in the old teapot—which it must never be forgotten was adorned with red roses—so that he might persuade his brother poverty had come upon them, and could enjoy the thrill later on of convincing him it was not so, surely the same idea would occur to the mind of Oli and impel him to secrete the other half of the money in the warming-pan. Even while they rejoiced together over the well-filled box, neither would make confession. The warming-pan and the teapot were restored to their usual places and decked with seasonable green stuff, but as for the money, it had been spirited away by those powers which exist during the legendary period, and it had been restored to them with interest, owing to those days of privation when there had been no meat for their bodies nor oil for the lamp, by the pure white magic of Christmas. But it was a merry morning behind the pink wall.

"Where be your Christmas dinner?" said Oli.

"Us ha' got plenty o' vegetables," reminded Eli; and then the four eyes shone out like Aldebaran, Antares, Arcturus, and Altair.

"Be us to starve in the middle o' money?" asked Oli; but his little brother had the answer ready, "Us gets what us prays vor. Us prayed vor the money to be brought back, and here it be. My dear," said Eli solemnly, "I asks yew to go out

into the garden and pray four times vor a gude dinner to be sent along."

"What be yew agwaine to du?" asked Oli.

"I'll bide here and open the window to let the dinner in," replied Eli, pushing his brother towards the door. "One of us mun stay behind to keep they artful old cats from getting on the table."

Oli departed, somewhat unwillingly, but anxious to know what would take place during his absence; and going to the higher part of the garden, which was open to all the land, he delivered his wish four times, to each point of the compass, and returned to the cottage in such a hurry that he caught the magician in the very act of placing upon the table the last article, which was a pudding, very large and round; and so fruitful had been the fourfold prayer that Oli saw also all the materials for the dinner of his dreams; the tin of ox-tail soup, the dried haddock, and a sirloin rich and red.

"Yew had hardly gone out, my dear," said the officiant, "when I heard a sort o' rustling to the window, and I went and opened him, and all these gude things came flapping in like bumbledors."

"I be mazed," muttered Oli; and then he cried, "Yew ha' broke into my room."

"I ain't been near your room," said Eli.

"Where did 'em all come from then?"

"Out o' the old teapot wi' red roses on him. 'Tis the dinner yew said yew had a fancy vor."

Oli began to smile broadly. He saw everything now. The historical deeds became clear before him, and so he seized Eli by the shoulders and urged him towards the door, saying, "Now 'tis your turn to go out while I watches the window."

Eli trotted off, having also arrived at the age of understanding, and when he returned there was another dinner, "took out o' the warming-pan," and precisely the same as the first. All the good things were in duplicate, and Oli merely repeated

what his brother had said before him, "'Tis the dinner yew said yew had a fancy vor."

"When us ha' eaten it," said Eli, "I'll be strong enough to put yew down upon the cabbage stalks."

"I'll be lusty tu," said Oli. "I'll throw ye into the brimmly hedge."

"'Tis agwaine to be a merry Christmas, I reckon. But what be us to du wi' two gude dinners, my dear?"

There was a pause before Oli replied, with labouring philosophy, "When volks ha' got two gude dinners and t'other volks ha' one bad dinner, 'tis the duty of volks what ha' got the plenty to give to they what ha' got the little."

"I ha' half a mind to tak' my dinner to old Judy Boone," said Eli.

"I ha' a mind to go with ye," said Oli.

So the brothers put one of the dinners in a large basket and carried it out into mist-land and brought it to Judy Boone, who had little indeed; and her thanks and blessings gave an added flavour to their meat.

There was no fixed hour for the mighty meal. The brothers passed the time pleasantly in making preparations, singing, and playing their little tricks. If theirs seemed a chronicle of small deeds, it was also one of great happiness. But the shadow, which can never be excluded altogether, was to pass along, and it entered during the afternoon, when there came a gentle tap upon the door, and Eli and Oli hurried together to be the first to open and wish the visitor a Merry Christmas.

Two women entered out of the dark mists, clad in black themselves; one ungainly, but strong and self-possessed; the other pallid, torpid, but shivering whenever a man spoke to her.

"Please to come in," said the brothers; but they did not add the good wishes of the season. They felt it would be a mockery to those black and dreary figures, worn out by work and wickedness.

"Us comed out to afternoon service to hearken to the carols,"

said Temperance. "I reckoned I'd come in and tell ye—about him." Her voice for those two last words became a whisper.

"Be it all over, my dear?" asked Oli.

"A week ago. They never told we avore. They ses he never spoke agin."

"Mebbe he be having a right merry Christmas," said Oli tenderly.

"How be yew, my dear?" said Eli in his kindly voice; but Patience only shivered and did not answer.

"Mother be friends agin," Temperance murmured, although she could not tell of that scene when Patience had gone down in the mud of the court and crawled to her mother's feet, or of those howls and tears with which the evil spirit had departed from her. "Us be going from Love Lane when mother's time be up. 'Tis tu much vor she, and the poor old soul ha' worked enough. I wishes yew a Happy Christmas," she said feebly.

"Us ha' got it," said the brothers simply.

"I hopes yew and she will be happy," said Eli.

"Ever afterwards," added Oli.

"I hopes God will bless yew, my dear," whispered Eli to Patience; but she only shuddered.

"Thank ye kindly," said Temperance. Then she flamed out, "They rings the bells vor any old thing. They rings 'em when squire comes home. They wun't ring one vor he."

"Hush, my dear," said Eli. "A man can get into heaven wi'out an old iron bell."

The black sisters went out; Temperance first, with her heavy tread and clumsy movements, then dumb Patience, without a sound, but always trembling like a cold spirit looking for the body it had lost.

Eli and Oli sat over the fire, hand in hand like two toddling infants, while Tom and Ted sprawled at their feet sniffing the splendid odours from the pot. The day was dead already like a sickly child.

"He never done it," remarked Eli at length.

"Du ye mean to say he didn't play foul wi' Timothy?" asked Oli.

"I don't know," said Eli. "I wur thinking o' the preaching and of Church Beer. 'Tis almost better vor a man not to interfere wi' volk."

"Us knew Mark Yeo."

"A strong man."

"He wouldn't hurt another."

"Then he never done it."

"No, I reckon," said Oli.

"He never done it," repeated Eli. "I don't hardly know what I means, and I fancies he didn't know either. But he didn't do it. He did nothing. B'ain't that right, my dear?"

"Ees, I reckon," said Oli.

CHAPTER XXVII

ABOUT THE END

TIME came in its free style to a wild day in June. Dartmoor is no respecter of seasons and will roar in latest spring full as fiercely as in mid-winter; hating established custom as it does, and railing against civilisation which draws an imaginary line like the equator between this and that. The wind raced through small lanes, forcing gates open, and holding them so, quivering; set the dry furze-bushes rattling, and reeds and heather vibrating like harp-strings; sporting even with the loose knocker on Gerard's door, lifting it, tapping now sharply, then nervously as the mischievous spirit took it. Gerard had looked out more than once to see nothing but mists, either rolling along or waiting about like a messenger or mendicant; but there was a voice in the howling as well as a tricky spirit, and presently it became a sort of piping imitative of the human voice. It was still playing with the knocker in a tremulous manner, and when no attention was given, it flung itself rudely against the window as if it would enter there; and, like a parrot, it tried to cry, "Coles, master, coles!"

It was necessary to secure that crazy knocker with a piece of string, else the rapping might continue all night and drag a lot of bad dreams into the bedroom. As for the voice, it must continue. Who could pour oil upon the troubled wind?

So Gerard went to the door; and things had been blown into the corner of the porch, sand and pieces of stick, with leaves that had known greener days, and a goblin also, very much of a parcel of bones wrapped up in rags of a good old

age, and a voice explained what was there by saying, "I be a very old man, master."

"I thought it was the wind," said Gerard.

"I wur calling and knocking, sir," said Old Coles. "I be alive, sir," he said eagerly.

"I see you are," said Gerard, wondering how this creature managed to get about and deal in such weighty stuff as coal, for he seemed unable to stand without assistance from the door-post, and against that he held himself with a stick while he began the long and weary search for his pocket with a poor old relic of a hand which knew where it ought to go, but somehow missed its aim.

Necessity kept Old Coles on the move. It was not necessary to live, but it was necessary to move and go on doing things while he did live. Those of the road, strollers and vagabonds in desolate places, get the toughness of the ash and the strength of hedge-weeds into them, and they live on. They see the young folk out, they bury their great-grandchildren, they watch the road crumbling, but they remain and subsist upon a few loose coppers; and when their time comes they die in queer positions.

"Yew owes me money, sir. Thirty shilluns, master. Coals be cruel dear, and I minds the time when they wur common."

He produced a scrap of paper, one of his cryptograms, and upon it was scratched, "Recd by Mr Wreaford one tun Coles, price 30—0—0."

It was all vague. The old man did not add the date, because he never could remember it. He could not spell his own name nor yet that of the commodity he dealt in, but this was no marvel. That he was able to do anything at all was the wonder.

"Who unloaded the coals?" Gerard asked.

"I did, master."

"You couldn't. It's impossible."

"There 'em be, master, in the linhay, gurt big lumps, and I carried 'em one by one. I don't think on't now 'tis done."

"I will get your money," said Gerard, and he went, while the wind followed and kept on piping, "I be a very old man."

When he came back Wreford was in the same position, but his eyes were shut, and Gerard had to shake him gently before he returned to consciousness.

"Here is your money. Let me put it in your pocket for you. You are very tired."

"I be agwaine to ha' a gude rest, master," said Old Coles feebly. "I be agwaine to sleep to-night as I ha' never slept avore, and when I wakes up I'll ha' the little maid wi' me. To-morrow be Thursday, sir."

"I know it is," Gerard muttered, with something like a shudder; for it was the day on which he was to stand beneath the copper-beech and swear to Edith he deserved her.

"I be to meet the little maid to-morrow, sir, meet she face to face and bring she home. I wish yew gude night, master, and thank ye kindly."

"Good night, Mr Wreford."

"I'll ha' the little maid wi' me to-morrow. I be agwaine to rest now."

Gerard went out and helped the old man into the cart, and the wind seemed to carry them away. Along the big road they went, but Old Coles did not appear to notice it much. Perhaps he did not notice it at all. He was very much bent, but that would be because the wind was blowing in his face. The pony knew the way so well, and it stepped out briskly, needing no encouragement to return to its stable; up the long hill, across the stretch of moorland, and so along to the old turnpike and the little staring cottage and the garden which George Vid had ruined; and the pony drew up quietly at the door, but the old man did not move, for he was resting. He had done a great deal that day, had wrestled with coals as Will had wrestled with granite, and the wind had blown him over more than once; so he was entitled to a sleep, for to-morrow would be Thursday, and he had the little maid to meet.

The pony, too, had worked and was hungry, so it did not

long remain beside the gate. It moved to where the grass was tender and began to eat, and the old man seemed to look on, but would not interfere, for the pony was entitled to its meat. He simply sat between the sacks and went on resting, and perhaps he thought a little and rejoiced in the things of beauty, for there was a queer, sad smile upon his face.

The pony moved along, picking the sweet grass, and dragged the cart away from the cottage, which went on staring. Darkness came on, and still the old man rested, and if the wind was cold he did not shiver. Traffic went by, and drivers saw the shape in the cart, and some of them shouted; but their voices did not wake him up, for he was sleeping as he had never slept before, and perhaps he was nearer the little maid than one might think.

And so the pony rambled on feeding, and Old Coles went on resting, through the night.

The wind was not dead, but sleeping too, and the sun was born again, and the rosebuds discovered it was the thirteenth day and the Ides, and they were late. Gerard sat in his room; far too much had there been of that sitting, that lust for a low chair, instead of the wise walking and prowling about woods, aimless possibly, but excellent for the mind; the house instead of the open, and the smell that of burning; the peat upon the hearth had been his incense; he had smelt that, the breath of fire, and had missed the pale primroses; and he was holding a book. Not a wise one, not the book of a father or philosopher, but a fool's book, a penny thing ruled with faint lines and scribbled over with fool's figures. Lies, too: even here in a diary the man must keep back the truth, although no eyes would see the pages but his own. He must lie to himself and satisfy his soul with the old argument, that to deceive others he must first be able to deceive himself. Gerard and that book of deeds were a mass of clerical errors.

The easiest way of telling a lie is to leave a blank, and upon those pages were many an hiatus; sometimes a dash, a line like the contortion of a viper, or a symbol such as the tail of

a tadpole, the head of an arrow, cross, or dagger, to denote something in the way of pain, nervous depression, solitude; an excuse, a justification, a display of something small, a comic conceit to hide what was great and no food for laughter; just as an insane giant, who had lost his mantle of enchantment, the possession of which rendered him invisible to his enemies, might attempt to conceal his cold body by surrounding it with a pocket-handkerchief; like the cock shut up with the horses imploring, "Gentlemen, let us not move about lest we tread on one another." Weakness will come at last to regard strength as a fool's portion, something heavy and simple, a thing to be easily outwitted by a trick. Cunning will play with a pen, describe dots and dashes, and please itself with the fancy that it has won the battle by shirking the blow. Even the man who has the scar between his shoulder-blades will declare he was looking back as he ran. He was still facing the enemy.

That little book in manuscript was the record of one who kept his heart up; not the record of a drunkard who went to some lion's den each evening, and staggered to the sleeping-place he called home at midnight; but something worse, the record of a hypocrite who kept the blinds down and the curtains drawn. The very simplicity of the deed gave it a kind of innocence. The physical process of procuring happiness was elementary to a sin. To come home tired, to set the kettle on the fire, to pour a little of that grape-juice into a bright glass, add lumps of sugar, then hot water, to watch the steam arising, to smell its fragrance; and then to work. The motive power was there, the ease and strength of a well-oiled machine, a body that felt supple and confident, a tongue that could speak, a brain that could imagine. To do it the second time and the third time, then to lose count, and if the foot stumbled on the threshold the work was done.

What was that book then but a witness that he had kept the vow? Every man takes that which will refresh his energies or vanquish pain; and no man who is decent will take more than is enough. The record was to satisfy Gerard that he had done

his duty. It was not to show that he had renounced the habit. The demon was on his shoulders with tight legs about his neck, and he had neither time nor energy to shake it off. The symbols upon certain days meant merely temporary oblivion, rather more suffering than usual, a fierce attack of what is known as a fit of the blues, a sense of loneliness almost insupportable; nothing more.

And yet there were results which Gerard could not explain away. It was a strange fact that he had become incapable of deep feeling. Nothing touched him seriously. He really did not care what happened so long as he had his little room with the kettle singing on the hearth and a pair of loose slippers handy. He was not greatly concerned about that promised living; his sermons had become dull types of orthodoxy, and his pulpit manner was from the rector's point of view irreproachable. He seemed likely now to get on in the world, but the thought gave him no pleasure. Hosken assured him with satisfaction that he had conquered himself completely, and Gerard almost believed him; but the truth remained that he took no interest in life. There were—to be frank—only two matters which touched his sympathies; and they were love and the brandy-bottle.

Edith remained a kind of fixed idea which never changed, always the same shape and the same distance away. She was a cold star which he hoped some day to convert into a dwelling-place, to accept the fine weather of it without gratitude and to grumble at the bad: and yet she, too, became something different and connected with the bottle, as the angel of it, the goddess supplementary to it. Edith would see that the easy chair was placed in the right position, she would set the table handy, and with her own small hands manipulate the kettle and place the lumps of sugar in the glass when he came home weary and had to prepare himself for sermon-writing. It was a happy prospect. Edith would soon understand how foolish it was to be unpopular and unlike other people. She would get reconciled to the way in which men live. Gerard was

growing up resembling Vivian, whom he tried to imitate. He liked the idea of matrimony. It amused him.

"Three o'clock. Beneath the copper-beech. Bring a knife with you."

Such was the message he had received from Edith, the first for nearly six months, and it sounded rather grim, as Gerard did not know the purpose of the knife. It was that Edith might continue her symbol, not the dot or dash which signified a lie, but the two added sides of the square which she was to cut upon the tree as a sign of her happiness; which she would not cut at all unless quite certain of having won her title to those right lines and angles representing the temple she had built.

His courage failed, and to strengthen it he took a little—ask him not how much—before starting on the mad quest. The shortest way was across the fields of Love Lane, through the bottoms beyond, and so on to the little stony road; but as he left the cottage he heard the bell; and it was tolling, and frightened him because it sounded like the end.

George Vid came along in his little cart, and Gerard stopped him to inquire about the bell.

"My dear old friend, Mr Wreford, is safe in the arms of Jesus," said the old humbug, his glass-covered eyes gleaming with wrongly placed righteousness.

"Old Coles dead! He was with me last evening."

"I discovered him this morning," said George. "I met his cart in a small lane nearly half a mile from the old turnpike. The pony was feeding by the wayside, and my dear old friend was sitting between two sacks with a peaceful and blessed smile upon his face. Happy are they who die in the Lord, dear sir. I loved Mr Wreford. With my whole heart and soul I loved him. He was always thinking of the little maiden. Now he has gone to her in the better land."

"He was very old. It was time for him to go," Gerard said absently.

"I fear he died a pauper," boomed Vid. "Mr Wreford was

never a saving soul. He was not fitted, sir, for business. His errors were of the elementary kind. He could not reckon, sir. That is the only fault I have to find with the dear departed. His enemies, if he had any, could find no worse thing to say about him. I suffer by his death, sir, as he owed me money for goods supplied, but there is furniture in the cottage, and to-morrow, sir, it will be my painful duty to go as a creditor to take stock of it."

"He had his funeral expenses anyhow," said Gerard. "I gave him thirty shillings yesterday."

"Did you indeed, sir? I am thankful to hear that. It would cut me to the heart to think that a dear old friend of mine should meet with a pauper's funeral"; and George Vid smiled and wrapped the brown coat round his legs. He had not disdained to rob a corpse.

Gerard went on, and his path cut across Love Lane, and went along the fields of symbolism where there was little of human life. No creature moved along that leafy lane, down which for many a thoughtful month of moons had passed a figure which had haunted the dreams and entered into the imagination of one outside these three pictures, who, before they are turned towards the wall of oblivion, may yet step for a moment beside Gerard with sincerity and honesty of purpose, nothing extenuating, but not with malice—a small pale man, young and serious, with a bundle upon his shoulder and eyes that looked beyond. Often had they met in the pale moonlight and glanced at one another encouragingly, although it was not permitted to speak because of the wall; and the dogs did not growl at the small pale man, but possibly they did not see him, and perhaps, if they did, they understood he was the friend of one who loved them. So he passed down to the gate of the court and disappeared, always walking in the same direction, in the manner of one who could not find the way and walking because he must, and the bundle was always upon the left shoulder, and the right hand seemed to wish to greet another; and while the vision remained during those thought-

ful months, when there was neither speech nor hearing, it seemed to be something divine, a sign pointing towards a duty now discharged, like a debt rendered in base copper, because of silver and gold there are none.

Gerard passed on, freed from the influences of the lane, and entered the field of Furze, not noticing anything here, nor did he hear the screams of a tortured rabbit in a trap; and he came into the field of Heather, still indifferent, paying no heed to the strange forms of vegetation, so many of them diseased yet enduring and handing on disease allied with life; and many of them horrible in form, yet clinging to it, not wishing to change and take another softer shape, enduring in their unpleasantness and dirt in the dark squalor of the ditches; and at last he crossed the field of Granite, and here he stumbled, for the way was rough. It was no place for him, and the God of the saxifrage was sorry to see him stumbling.

Edith, too, was on her way to the wood of the young river by a ridiculous journey upon that stiffly-ruled thing the railway, which moved her from one place to another and dropped her far from the beech-tree. She had to hire a conveyance, and that also could not take her the whole way, so inaccessible was the meeting place. She saw the white house where Mrs Allen had tormented her, and thick smoke issued from a chimney as if the mistress was sacrificing to her fierce gods. She saw the fields where she had wandered, waving with long June grasses, and she liked them then because of the pleasure of coming back, of renewing the story, since with human nature it is a kind of happiness not to end a thing entirely, to keep the way back open even to the sad places, and not to think it is the end. She welcomed the trees as she went along, and told them they had grown, and she knew just where to look for violets. Would she have loitered had she not been nervous? It was already past three, and Gerard would be waiting; and he—had he been like the trees and grown?

Edith saw the foot-bridge, beyond the stony hill, and the pines of her wood nodding; but where were the wine-coloured

leaves, and where was the smooth trunk bearing the little narrow gash which she had made? The place had not changed, but she could not find her tree. It must be there, for when she came near the bridge she saw some of the red leaves spilt among the stones, but still she saw nothing of the trunk wherein her ring had been hidden, and the rind which was to bear the symbol four square of her perfect life.

But what she did see was Gerard like a willow, a pliant figure, no young oak nor even a wind-resisting fir; the shape of one who had not benefited the race, who would only hand life on as a thing to play with; a wilfully barren growth, producing no flowers, though it was time for them. That was not the attitude of nervousness alone. It was that of a man creeping beside the wall, afraid to remove his hand from it. Gerard thought he was the same. He did not know how he had changed to Edith's eyes. She stopped.

"I must not spy upon him. It is not fair."

So she turned her back and looked up at the clouds. Nor was there upon that small face, where strength and sweetness met in good proportion, any sign of misery. There was sorrow, there was pity; but not suffering. Edith would not have it. She, too, had made the journey through the field of furze, the field of heather, and now upon the field of granite she saw light. There was a cloudy sign for her upon the stones, and she knew what it meant. She had gone out to find love where it dwelt among the rocks; had missed it; and was now to save herself. The light was within revealing her soul, which was too fine a thing to cast away. There was waiting to offer itself a body. It was not enough, for it would corrupt, it would raise up corruption. No light was in it, for the flame which had flickered once was out, nor could it even splutter beneath the drenching.

So Edith was winning her way well to happiness and first to freedom. How good it was to have that discerning strength; to see so clearly what others would have missed. That itself was happiness. Was not Edith also in the lane, somewhat too

quiet and cold—though it might have been the moonlight which made her so—standing alone, very pale and sweet, rather too perfect, always apart? Mark and Edith, and the other spirits, all made mistakes in the lane. They walked in the wrong direction, followed the wrong things, but the shadows were perplexing; there were so many furze-bushes and clumps of heather, but it was clear among the granite. All was hard and straightforward there, and the path was easy to see. It led, indeed, to a wall, but there was fern on the other side; and so life ended in a mystery, and the circle came round again to the other mystery of beginning.

Edith walked out. Let it be over quickly, since an end was necessary, and Gerard stepped forward to meet her with fine human strength, which she glanced at and named decay. It was a new manner, not the shy lover, not the wild theological lover, but the blusterer, the man who is good enough for any woman, the confident lover who feels he can break down opposition.

"At last, Edith! You are late, and I began to think you could not come. Dear Edith, I have never seen you looking so nice."

She hardly noticed him, for her eyes were upon a trunk sprawling in the grass. Her beech-tree had been cut down, its branches had been lopped off, it lay on the ferns like a dismembered giant awaiting the cart which was to remove it to the saw-mill; and she saw the poor useless roots writhing from the ground.

Gerard approached her in a reckless way and took her arm.

"Dear Edith, I have come to claim your promise. The ring has been taken away, you see, but that does not matter. I will get you another to-morrow. I will send it you by post. No, I will come myself, and put it on your finger, for you are mine now, Edith. You know you promised, and you never break your word. Edith, dearest, I think I am worth you now. I am sure I am, and I'm getting on. Mr Hosken says I shall do well."

Edith drew herself away, but said no word; nor did she look at him, this prating man of the world whose word was worth nothing. She kept her eyes fixed upon the fallen tree and kept in her mouth one word.

"Edith, dear, don't be afraid of me. You never used to be," he went on in the same jaunty way. "You can't think how I have been looking forward to this day. I'm sure I deserve my reward. I am really getting on, Edith. I only stayed at Fursdon because of you, but I am wasted there. I could do so much better in a town. I am very careful not to offend people now. I try hard to please, and I'm getting popular. I may be given a good living some day, Edith."

Still she said nothing, and looked away from him. She turned her eyes from the mournful trunk and rested them upon the brook, trying to think about that progress, regarding it with the eye of prophecy, and almost foreseeing that day when the honest old tradesman, who had worked so hard for his son, would read in a chance newspaper how that the Reverend Gerard Spiller, formerly curate of Fursdon, had been found drunk and incapable in the street and been taken charge of by the police; and with what sorrow he would go away to his room and break his heart and make no more sausages.

"Edith, dearest, do speak to me. I know you love me still. You never change. And I have kept my promise."

Edith trembled.

"Let us go into the wood, dear. I will take your arm. I must. I am stronger than you, Edith, and I shall never let you go again. We will go to the place where you were so cruel to me, and where I promised—do you remember how I tore my hand in the brambles? Mr Vivian said I was a fool, and perhaps I was; but then I love you, Edith, and love makes a man able to do anything."

"I am happy," whispered Edith to herself. "I will be happy. I have a home with kind people who are fond of me. If I have missed the way so far, there is still time to find it. But I will not speak more than once."

She looked up.

"Edith—what is the matter?"

She went on looking at him.

"Oh, Edith, you never used to be like this! You are so sensitive, so queer. Your eyes are very beautiful, but they are like two stones almost. What have I done? I have never seen you look like this, not even when you were cruel to me. My own dearest girl, why ever don't you speak?"

He spoke fretfully, but could not look at her. Perhaps he was able then to guess what was written upon his face; which she could read and others could not.

"I know what it is," he said with a foolish laugh, seizing her hands almost roughly. "You have always been such a strange girl. You won't say a word to me until I tell you I have won you. Well, I have," he shouted fiercely. "I have worked hard, keeping you always in my thoughts, having your dear face eternally before me, with this day in view. Dearest, you will not fail me. I have kept my promise."

It was time to speak; time for the one word, the last and the end. The word to complete a work dealing with human nature, since it expressed the besetting sin of that nature, in every walk of life from highest to lowest, in church and state, the vice which runs like a black thread through all life gifted with the power of speech until it has become a habit merely. This was the word which Edith spoke; with which she began and ended,—

"Liar!"

THE END

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